THE BIG SHOT

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BOOKS BY

FRANK L. PACKARD

THE BIG SHOT
TIGER CLAWS
SHANGHAI JIM
THE DEVIL'S MANTLE
TWO STOLEN IDOLS
THE RED LEDGER
BROKEN WATERS
RUNNING SPECIAL
THE LOCKED BOOK
THE FOUR STRAGGLERS
JIMMIE DALE AND THE PHANTOM CLUE
DOORS OF THE NIGHT
PAWNED
THE WHITE MOLL
FROM NOW ON
THE NIGHT OPERATOR
THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE
THE ADVENTURES OF JIMMIE DALE
THE WIRE DEVILS
THE SIN THAT WAS HIS
THE BELOVED TRAITOR
GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN
THE MIRACLE MAN

THE BIG SHOT

BY

FRANK L. PACKARD

PUBLISHED FOR
THE CRIME CLUB, INC.
BY DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.
GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK, 1929

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES AT
THE COUNTRY LIFE PRESS
GARDEN CITY, N. Y.

FIRST EDITION

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THE BIG SHOT

CHAPTER I

"Wanted!"

IT CALLED itself the Gondola Restaurant. Heaven knew why! There were no gondolas within, and certainly there were no gondolas outside on Third Avenue. Joe Caprillo, its proprietor, however, was a Venetian. Its tablecloths were not overclean, but the food was good and moderately priced, and the little semiprivate stalls along the walls were always popular. Also, other than food might be obtained in the guise of innocent beverages—a fact not to be ignored in appraising the restaurant's popularity! It did a thriving business. It smiled alike on the just and on the unjust; and since its clientele was admittedly composed of more than a mere sprinkling of the latter, the Gondola had an air about it—as though something were always just going to happen. And why shouldn't something happen? Not so very long ago Soapy Connor had been shot to death there, and Jackie the Wop was even now waiting for the chair in the Big House for the killing.

The Gondola was always interesting—to Enid Howard. She had been here perhaps a dozen times

for late supper, and generally alone—as to-night. Of late, however, there had been exceptions to that—relatively speaking, quite a few of them. There was Phil Martin, for instance. Joe Caprillo, with whom she had become quite friendly, had told her that Signor Martin had been almost a constant visitor of late at the hour when, if she came at all, she patronized the Gondola. Joe Caprillo, the greasy little proprietor, had been obsequious and obvious, intending to please; she wondered, puckering her brow, just how much she was responsible for Mr. Martin's actions in this respect.

She had finished her supper—only her coffee remained. She glanced at her wrist watch. Half-past eleven. Quite beyond the usual hour. She was conscious of a little sense of disappointment. He was hardly likely to come this evening, at any rate.

From the stall in which she sat she could see the main entrance. Two men came in; a little hurriedly, a little excitedly, it seemed to her. She caught snatches of their conversation as they passed her, making for a table or stall farther in the rear. It was something about a police raid on a spaghetti joint a few blocks away—on Sixty-ninth Street, she thought they said. She watched them until they took seats. Quite probably a pair who had eluded the net and ducked in here for cover!

Her eyes roved around the room. The centre tables were fairly well filled; as were the stalls on the op-

posite side of the room. There was a lot of talking going on, but the voices were low—like the lights. The patrons paid attention to no one except their immediate companions. There were decent people here, of course—if one could pick them out; but that well-dressed, middle-aged man, who was talking so earnestly to the young man in the stall directly across from her, was, so Phil Martin had told her, an ex-convict who had already three convictions for felony against him, and would, under the Baumes Law, if convicted of a fourth, get life imprisonment. What was he talking about now? Would one or both of them be in the police line-up at headquarters to-morrow morning? Or would the papers carry the story of some fresh crime whose perpetrators were unknown? Or were they merely arguing about the practicability of the blindfold test to determine one brand of cigarettes from another?

Her mind reverted to Phil Martin. Phil Martin had pointed out more than one unsavoury character of innocent appearance in the Gondola, and not only had their police records at his finger tips but was personally acquainted with many of them as well. She had asked him how he knew all these people, and his reply had been at least plausible. He had said that he was a newspaper man. She did not know whether he was or not; but she was quite prepared to admit to herself that she liked him well enough in a friendly way to hope he was telling the truth.

Perhaps he was. Probably he was. But she had learned enough in her three months' stay in New York to know that appearances in Gangland, even to the extent of expensive and butler-equipped apartments on Park Avenue, might very easily be misleading and deceptive. She could not forget that, before he had first spoken to her, she had seen Phil Martin in here on several occasions in close communion with a miserable, shifty-eyed and repulsive-looking creature who needed no pointing out as a member in exceedingly good standing of the criminal class! They had appeared to be very pally together. Very much so!

She began to toy suddenly with her coffee cup. That was why, wasn't it, in spite of a feeling of mutual good-fellowship which had sprung up between them, she had kept him at a distance? She wasn't quite sure of him. He had not been any too communicative—but neither had she, for that matter. Perhaps it was her own fault that she did not know more about him. She had not invited confidences. She had enjoyed, very thoroughly enjoyed, sharing a table with him; but the acquaintanceship was still a very recent one.

She smiled now a little whimsically to herself. Her thoughts were dwelling rather persistently on Phil Martin, weren't they? Well, why not? It *was* a somewhat strange and unusual—what should she call it? —friendship?—that existed between them. It was

only a week ago that they had first spoken to each other. The Gondola had been crowded that night; but, having arrived early, she had secured her usual stall. Later on, when Phil Martin had come in alone, she was the only one in the restaurant who was occupying a table to herself. He had come over to her after a moment's hesitation, and asked if he might share her table. "If you say no," he had pleaded smilingly, "I shall have to go away hungry." He, himself, his appearance and his manner, she rather liked; but, remembering the questionable companion with whom she had seen him so often, she was not sure that she had been whole-heartedly pleased with his request. She had, however, invited him to sit down.

Naturally, they had not sat there for the better part of an hour like a pair of mutes! He had introduced himself. He was a newspaper man, he said. The *Herald-Star*. And she? She was writing a book. Oh, a writer! A community of interest! What kind of a book? A novel of the East Side. Who was going to publish it? She had not said. How could she? Well, her name? Oh, yes—that! She had told him her name. After that they had chatted pleasantly. He talked well. He had told her stories of East Side life and had pointed out several notorious characters who had been in the Gondola that night. He had asked, a little diffidently, to see her home. She had refused.

Since then, in the week that followed, though never by appointment, they had had late supper together here in the Gondola on three occasions. She had liked him better each time. He knew so much about the East Side. He was a fund of information. His manner and his attitude toward her had been impeccable —only that unsavoury boon companion of his, still glimpsed in the offing, disturbed her. He had not even referred to the man. To invite confidence was to give in return. She had asked no questions. She still kept the barriers up between them; she still refused to permit him to accompany her home. He had been, especially last night, almost offended because she would not let him pay her check. But that was not in the bargain, either. Yes, certainly, to say the least of it, their relations toward one another were a trifle bizarre!

She lifted her shoulders in an expressive little shrug. Well, anyway, it was time to go. She called her waiter and paid her bill—and then, almost on the point of rising, she saw the door open, and saw the object of her thoughts making his way directly toward her. It was utterly absurd, but she was nevertheless conscious of a suddenly heightened colour in her cheeks. For an instant she was panicky lest he should notice it, but by the time he had reached the table she had taken refuge behind that impregnable feminine fortress, a compact, and her composure had returned.

"My luck's holding to-day, all right, Miss Howard," was his cheery greeting. "I was afraid I was too late and that you would have gone—even if you had been here at all."

"I was just going," she smiled.

"Well, then, please don't—not for a few minutes, anyhow," he pleaded. "I'll just"—he beckoned to a waiter—"order a bite, and then I'll tell you something worth while. I'm afraid I can't let you use it in your book, but I think you'll find enough colour in it to interest you. You'll stay, won't you?"

"This is pure bribery!" asserted Enid Howard sternly—but there was laughter in her brown eyes.

"Sure, it is!" he admitted frankly.

"Then I'll stay—for a little while," she agreed.

She studied him as he studied the menu. He was not handsome—she had decided that long ago; but he was undeniably good-looking in a wholesome, rugged way. Those steady gray eyes might become very steely, and that square chin be very definitely set in moments of stress or anger, but she had never seen him in such a mood. He could not be more than twenty-four, and very little less than six feet in height. She liked the way he dressed. That dark-gray tweed suit set off his broad shoulders and went well with his sunburned complexion and fair hair.

He looked up from the menu.

"I know you have already had supper, but isn't there something I could order for you?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Thank you, no," she answered. "I couldn't possibly eat anything more."

"Sure?"—a little entreatingly.

"Quite sure."

Phil Martin gave his order to the waiter, and dismissed the man.

"Well?" she prompted, as her companion remained for a moment silent. "Shall we proceed to the payment of that bribe? I warn you that it must be wholly adequate, for it is already quite a little past my usual hour."

"After Lugo comes back. I'd rather not take the chance of even a stray word being overheard," he said seriously.

"That sounds momentous!"

"It is!" he said. "It's front-page stuff. I told you my luck was in. But meanwhile there's something else I want to say. I tried to screw up courage to say it last night, but I couldn't quite make the grade. I don't want you to think I'm butting in. It's about you."

She looked at him questioningly, but without comment. He seemed suddenly ill at ease, fumbling unnecessarily with his cigarette case as he took it from his pocket and selected a cigarette.

"I know you don't smoke," he said; "but I know you don't mind if I do." He hesitated for an instant. "It's none of my business, of course, and I haven't

the slightest right to say it, except that—well, I just feel I ought to as a—a friend—if you will let me call myself that. I know a lot more about conditions around here in this locality than you do. I'm just going to push all bunk and flattery to one side and say that you're too dashed pretty and attractive a young woman to come unaccompanied to joints like this. I know what you're after—atmosphere, and first-hand information, and all that sort of thing—but it's risky and dangerous."

He was too obviously sincere to be misunderstood. Even that determined jaw looked a little more determined now in his earnestness. She answered him in like measure.

"I have never been molested," she said quietly; "and I think that a girl who minds her own business has very little to fear. Besides, I feel quite sure that I can take care of myself. I've been more or less brought up that way, you see. We were very much an out-of-doors family. As I told you the other night, I am a Canadian, and I've camped and hunted through our Rockies and up north of the Peace River district for months at a time with my father. My brother was reported 'missing' in the war, and as soon as I was old enough I took, or tried to take, his place with Dad. The mountains and plains and forests give one a different outlook on these things, put one more on one's own, don't you think? I am perfectly certain, for instance, that I am a very much better shot

than any of the undesirables who are sitting around us with guns, or 'rods' as I believe they call them, parked in holsters at their waists or under their left armpits, and"—she burst into a little laugh—"I've even got a rod myself."

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, and leaned forward toward her, his eyes straying from hers to the small black handbag that lay on the table edge beside her. "You don't mean to say that you've got one here?"

"Perhaps," she smiled.

"Wow! Don't you know there's a five years' sentence for that?"

"Only in connection with the commission of a felony," she corrected him coolly; "otherwise it is simply a misdemeanour—if one hasn't got a permit."

"But you haven't got a permit?"

"No; of course not." She leaned back in her chair, watching him in secret amusement. He was frowning in a puzzled and bewildered way. "Yes?" she invited.

"I am going to add another adjective to what I said a moment ago," he blurted out. "You are a very extraordinary young woman. But, in spite of that, I am coming back to my original point. I think this sort of thing is dangerous; and, above all, I do not think it is safe for you to walk from here alone and at night to the neighbourhood where you live."

She stiffened suddenly in her chair.

"How do you know where I live?" she demanded sharply.

He was crunching the end of his cigarette in the ash tray.

"I followed you," he confessed calmly.

"Oh!" She reached angrily for her gloves and handbag. "Somehow I did not think that *you* would do that!"

"I have followed you every night," he said in a low voice, "either by myself, or together with that unprepossessing chap you must have seen me with." He was still crunching at his cigarette and he did not look up. "Surely you understand. Surely you know why. It couldn't possibly have been to pry upon you—could it?"

She felt the colour flood her face. She did not like the idea of being followed by anyone for any reason, but she had been a little too hasty in her judgment. She owed him amends. He had been genuinely concerned about her. She laid her gloves back on the table beside the handbag.

"I am sorry I said that," she said frankly. "I—I am quite sure you were prompted only by kindness; but you must never do such a thing again, for I cannot agree with you that there is even the slightest cause for alarm."

He looked up at her now with a disarming grin.

"Well, there is an alternative," he suggested.

She shook her head.

"No"—her voice was serious in spite of her responsive smile—"I do not wish to be accompanied, either—at present, anyhow. My—I'll call her my housekeeper—is away. The neighbours know that. I have myself to think of."

"But," he protested, "I——"

"There are no 'buts,' " she interrupted with quiet emphasis. "Either you must agree on both counts, or else I shall have to find some other place for supper hereafter."

"That's worse than bribery!" he declared reproachfully. "That's holding a pistol to a fellow's head!"

"Well, it's loaded," she retorted, "and business is meant! Here is Lugo with your supper. Shall I stay or——"

"I agree," he said hastily. "What else can I do? But just the same, I do not like it. I'm not so sure"—ruefully—"that my luck *is* holding out!"

The waiter placed Phil Martin's order on the table and departed.

"Aren't you?" she inquired laughingly. "Well, anyhow, I'm all curiosity about the luck you have had. That's what you were going to tell me about, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he said. "And I'll tell you now, between mouthfuls, if you'll promise not to look at that wrist watch again for the next ten minutes. Listen! Do you know what a Big Shot is?"

She nodded her head.

"I think I do," she said. "It's what the gangsters, or any mob for that matter, call their leader, isn't it?"

"Right! You're making famous progress. You'll be able to talk the whole lingo in its revised edition before long. It was a 'rod' a minute ago. Where do you get it?"

"Quite a lot of it from you. You've been very helpful!" she answered naïvely. "Please go on."

"Delighted to have been of any assistance!" he laughed; and then, suddenly serious again: "All right! There are any number of little fellows who get that name. There may be only three or four of them working together, but one of them is always the Big Shot. There isn't a crook who doesn't yearn for the title and distinction. It elevates him to the peerage of the underworld; and the bigger and more important the gang, of course, the more purple and ermine he wears. So the name is common enough; but for quite a long time now it has been pretty well recognized by the police that there's just *one* Big Shot in New York. But they've never spotted him, never identified him. From here and there hints and rumours have dribbled in, and there has been more or less intangible evidence that the same man is the guiding spirit of a number of different gangs that work their own lines without any apparent connection with one another. You know what I mean. He seems to have a finger in every pie. One pie isn't big

enough for him. He seems to be out after all the plums—making and shoving the 'queer'; bootlegging on a large scale; a crap circuit; and a general following of stick-up men and steerers. Some bird, eh? I told you it was front-page stuff."

Enid Howard knitted her brow into little furrows as Phil Martin reattacked his plate.

"But I don't see how such a man could evade identification, let alone capture," she commented. "Surely, if what you say of him is true, he ought to be easy enough to find."

Phil Martin laughed a little grimly.

"Yes, you'd think so, wouldn't you? But the fact remains that that's the way it's been, and even tonight, though it looks like the beginning of the end for him, he's still a good deal of a mystery just the same."

"I don't know what you mean by that," she said in a puzzled way. "Have the police finally got him?"

"No!" he said. "That's where my luck is in. I think I've got a lead that's sure fire!"

"You?" She leaned across the table. "But what have you got to do with it?"

"Everything!" he answered, his eyes dancing excitedly over the rim of his coffee cup. "It will be the biggest scoop any New York newspaper has ever had. I'll even have his *photograph* before morning. We'll have the goods on him in the next few days, all right,

and have a special ready on the press when we tip off the police."

"And then?" she asked.

"Then?" he repeated in amazement. "Why, good heavens, don't you see? The *Herald-Star* gets the credit, and the Big Shot gets life—if he's lucky enough to escape the chair."

"Oh!" she said, a little faintly. "And you? What do you get out of it?"

"I? It's my job. If I'm fortunate enough to pull it off, I've done a big thing for my paper; and a big thing for society in putting the most dangerous criminal in New York out of the way. You get that, don't you?"

She made no direct answer.

"I don't see how you could have succeeded where the police seem to have failed so completely," she observed.

"More good luck than anything else," he said frankly. "I don't want you to think I'm posing as any super-sleuth-hound. It's due to the fact that about a year ago I was able to help that chap you've seen me with out of a little jam he got into with the police. He's got a bit of a record, of course, and several aliases, but he's generally known as Shive Frank. I guess I'll have to help you there a little. A shive is a knife. His past history shows a predilection for that weapon rather than a rod—hence his moniker."

Enid Howard cupped her chin in her hand thoughtfully.

"I've wondered a good deal about him, and what you two could have in common," she admitted. "He sounds even worse than he looks!"

Phil Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"He is," he said; "but he's very valuable—to me. About ten days ago I ran into him quite by accident in a spaghetti house. I hadn't seen him since the time I'd been able to pull that friendly office for him nearly a year back. I asked him where he'd been, and he said that he got into some trouble with his gang and had to duck, but that the mob had since broken up and that most of them were in Sing Sing. So he was back. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that he squealed on them to save his own hide."

"Do they know whom they have to thank?" she asked pertinently.

Phil Martin smiled faintly.

"They've more than a faint suspicion, I fancy."

Her lips tightened.

"Well, then," she said tersely, "from even the little I've seen and heard of the underworld amenities I should not care to stand in his shoes. What would you prophesy?"

"The inevitable," he answered promptly. "Some day he'll be bumped off, and that's what's worrying me—not altogether from the humanitarian standpoint, I'll admit, for he's not an asset to any com-

munity, but because I've been afraid ever since he began to open up a little that they'd take him for a ride before he came through with me."

"You're honest about it, anyway," she smiled quizzically. "And did it ever occur to you that, being so much in his company, you might suffer the penalty that sometimes befalls the innocent bystander?"

"There's always a slight chance, of course," he replied; "but that's part of the game. Anyhow, to continue, I knew he could talk a lot if he wanted to, so I chummed up with him. But it was slow going. He was pretty leery, and he was in bad as it was. I talked to him about the Big Shot, but it was only two or three nights ago that he began to come across —and then I think it was out of revenge and not out of any friendliness for me, once he was sure he wasn't going to get any publicity out of it. He said that three or four years ago he was in another gang—box workers—safes, you know—that was headed by a man named Hal Varney plus a few other convenient names. Shive Frank used to be very thick with Varney—used to go off on Coney Island trips and that sort of thing with him—and once on one of these excursions three or four of them had had their pictures taken together. He said he had one of these pictures but he didn't know where it was. He promised to try to find it for me. Then he said he and Varney had had a row. He claimed that he'd got done on a split, and that Varney had let him down.

So Shive left the gang. He said that the gang was still hanging out at the same old place at the back of Izzy Myers's junk shop on First Avenue, and——"

Phil Martin paused, and was silent for a moment while he made another onslaught on his plate.

"I'm afraid I'm rambling a bit and am a little disconnected," he went on finally, "but that's the way Shive Frank was. He said that even at the time he was thick with Varney, Varney was swinging other gangs, doing some bootlegging, backing a fence ring, taking the cut on a crap game—and boasting that he hadn't even begun. I remember the queer way Shive Frank smiled and licked his lips when I said: 'That's the man I'm looking for! There isn't a doubt of it!' 'Sure,' he said, 'I knew that from the first. Well, what about it?' 'Can you find him—point him out?' I asked. 'Is he still with that gang at Izzy Myers's place?' 'As far as I know, he's still running it—from off stage,' Shive answered. 'But I don't think many of them know him by the name of Varney any more, and I guess he ain't seen around very much except by a few, and then only on the big stuff. If you ask me I'd say he's wearing dress shirts a lot these days. It ain't so easy. I ain't seen him for three years.' "

Enid Howard was leaning forward tensely now as her companion paused again. She could not have explained exactly why. It wasn't just because it was the story of a man hunt, was it? Perhaps it was the

"colour" in it. Perhaps it was because the character of this Shive Frank was getting hold of her, as a peculiarly abhorrent one. Perhaps it was because with each word spoken she was becoming more and more convinced that Phil Martin really was a newspaper man. Perhaps this confidence that he was reposing in her had something to do with it, too!

"Yes, go on!" she begged. "I know I'm not giving you much chance to eat anything, but I'm going as soon as I've heard the rest of your story, and then you'll be able to finish your supper in peace."

"On that basis I'd like to drag it out," he told her impulsively. "Honest, I would! And I'm shameless enough to admit that's why I told you the story at all—just to keep you here for the little while I have. But I'm afraid there isn't much more to tell. Shive and I, separately and together, tried to locate Varney. He had described the man to me as he remembered him, but a mere description wasn't much to go on so far as I was concerned unless it embodied some distinctive mark of identification—and there isn't any in this case. There are thousands of black-haired, black-eyed, clean-shaven, husky-looking men about five feet eight in height, for instance. And Shive couldn't find the photograph. Neither of us got anywhere. And then, just as I was beginning to think we were up against a wall, the luck broke wide open. Shive telephoned me to-day that he'd not only found the photograph, but had got track of Varney him-

self. I'm to meet Shive later on to-night. That's the whole yarn. What do you think of it?"

She was silent for a moment, her eyes on greasy little Joe Caprillo at the desk, as she marshalled her thoughts and reactions.

"I think," she said at last, "that you will eventually get the Big Shot, and that your paper will score its scoop, thanks to you; but I cannot help feeling that, however much the Big Shot is 'wanted,' I wish it were this Shive Frank instead that you were after. He is despicable beyond words. He's nothing but a contemptible, cold-blooded squealer. And somehow I wish, too"—she hesitated slightly—"that your success might have come through some other medium. Do you mind my saying that?"

"No," he said gravely. "As a matter of fact, I agree with you, though I think the end amply justifies the means in this case. It isn't nice. But there was no other way."

"I suppose not," she admitted a little reluctantly. "Anyway, I want to thank you for telling me the story, and for"—she smiled in a quick, friendly way —"trusting me with it. And now I must go! It's an unconscionable hour!" She thrust out her wrist watch for him to see. "Half-past twelve!"

"It's fast," he asserted mendaciously. "Couldn't you——"

"Not possibly!"

"And you won't relent about permitting me to——"

"Not to-night, anyhow."

"Well, that's a concession, at least. In the meantime I suppose all I can do is bow to the inevitable."

They were both standing. He reached across the table to pick up her handbag for her. It was rather an exaggerated act of courtesy as it was a long reach. She noticed that his fingers were feeling surreptitiously over the bag.

"That hard object may be nothing more than my compact," she suggested sweetly.

He flushed suddenly red.

"Oh—damn!" he ejaculated in confusion; and then contritely: "I—I beg your pardon, Miss Howard. But if you won't let me go with you, you will be careful, won't you?"

"I am always careful," she said with a mischievous smile, as she held out her hand. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!" he answered in a cheery tone—but the gray eyes that followed a trim and dainty little figure to the door were clouded with a troubled and anxious look.

CHAPTER II

Gang Law

ENID HOWARD was singing. Not aloud, of course. A girl couldn't sing aloud at this hour of night on Third Avenue without inviting attention, even if there weren't so many people about. The song was really in the lightness of her steps, in the poise of her head and the tinge of heightened colour in her cheeks. She told herself that she was unaccountably happy. And then she contradicted herself. It wasn't unaccountable at all. Why shouldn't she be honest with herself? She no longer had any doubts about the man she had left standing at the table back there in the Gondola. She was glad, far more glad than she had believed it possible to be, that those doubts had vanished, and that Phil Martin was, she was now sure, just what he had described himself to be.

The symphony continued. Mechanically, three blocks away from the Gondola, she turned off the avenue into the cross street on which she lived, and headed in the direction of the East River. And then suddenly the symphony ceased, and a flurry of alarm took its place. There was not a soul to be seen down the length of the street, but at that instant she had

caught the sound of a man's footsteps coming rapidly after her. Perhaps, though, it was merely some wayfarer like herself returning home. She was not the only person who lived on the street. She quickened her pace. The man behind quickened his. She *was* being followed.

The neighbourhood was not reassuring. Phil Martin had told her so—told her it wasn't safe for her alone at night. She had never thought so before; but now she was conscious of a new and distinctly dismal air about her surroundings—that vacant lot across the way, for instance; the few small scattered stores, closed for the night, that had straggled off the avenue; and the broken line of darkened tenements that stretched before her. And the street wasn't any too well lighted, either, she noticed for the first time. What would she do? She had a good deal more than half the block to go yet. Her house was almost at the corner of Second Avenue. Scream for help? She could not imagine herself screaming. Granting even that there was anyone to answer her cries in time to be of assistance to her, there would inevitably be an aftermath of publicity about it. She did not want that at all!

Her mind was working rapidly. She was quite cool and collected again. She had told Phil Martin she was entirely able to take care of herself, hadn't she? Well, the man was not more than a few yards behind her now!

She snapped open her handbag, reached inside, transferred the bag to her left hand—and broke into a run. It would be worth while getting him under that street lamp ahead there just to see who he was.

And then the man's voice reached her.

"Aw, can de marathon stuff!" he called in a hoarse and slightly breathless voice. "I ain't goin' to hurt youse, Miss Howard. I just got a message for youse."

The sound of her name both startled her and brought her relief. She stopped abruptly and whirled around; but, still on her guard, she made no attempt to disguise the fact that a very serviceable little automatic was clasped in her right hand. And then, as the other came up to her, she recognized the man even in the still meagre light.

"Shive Frank!" she exclaimed.

"Sure!" he answered. His eyes fastened on the automatic in her hand, and a grin spread over his face. "Say, wot d'youse know about dat! A skirt wid a rod! Youse're some baby, ain't youse?"

Relief fled. His tones were as offensive as his words. His grin was repulsive. She drew back a step.

"What do you want?" she demanded sharply.

"How d'youse get high-hat dat way?" he retorted. "I'm doin' dis for a friend of yers." He pulled from his pocket what looked like a piece of torn wrapping paper, folded flat with an elastic band around it. "Dis is for Phil Martin."

"Then you had better give it to him yourself," she said crisply.

"Say, listen!" his voice was suddenly urgent. "I promised him dis to-night, but I didn't dare go near him. Dey knows him. He's been battin' around a lot wid me. An' I got a tip-off to-night dat I was spotted. See? I'm duckin' me nut right now for a few days on me country estate."

She shook her head.

"I do not care to have anything to do with it," she said emphatically; "but, even if I did, I have no idea when I shall see Mr. Martin again."

"Dat's all right! I ain't askin' youse to take it to him—"the unlovely grin spread itself again over Shive Frank's features—"I'll 'phone him dat I slipped it to youse. He knows where youse lives, an' though dere ain't no particular rush about him gettin' it, I guess mebbe wid dat excuse for a call he'll hop to it fast enough. Here, take it!"

Enid's dark eyes flashed angrily.

"I'll do nothing of the sort!" she declared.

"Dat's where youse're wrong, den," smirked Shive Frank, "'cause youse've got it now! See? Sorry I can't stay, but I told youse I was in a hurry. So-long, Bright Eyes!"

He was already several yards away, and walking rapidly down the street toward Second Avenue. She gave a little gasp that mingled surprise and dismay, as she stared after him. He had merely dropped the

folded piece of wrapping paper on the sidewalk at her feet. She had no choice now but to pick it up.

She restored her automatic to the handbag, and, picking up the paper, placed that also in the bag. She was angry with the man himself for his loathsome familiarity, and, knowing the man for what he was, still more incensed that such as he should in any way serve as a connecting link between Phil Martin and herself. Also she was displeased with Phil Martin. It wasn't very nice of him to have made this possible. Perhaps he could explain why he had shared his gratuitous surveillance with a man like Shive Frank in the first place! Well, he would have an opportunity to explain it the next time they met!

But now she frowned in sudden perplexity. She had no doubt that the brown paper wrapper contained the photograph of the Big Shot that Phil Martin had said Shive Frank was to give him to-night. What should she do? Phil Martin was undoubtedly still at the Gondola. But she most certainly did not relish the idea of going back there to him now—to invite the gaze of every eye and the comment of every tongue—and especially because of something that had been so insolently thrust upon her against her will, and which she had emphatically declared she would have nothing to do with. Besides, it wasn't a matter of life or death. It wasn't anything that could not wait until to-morrow—Shive Frank had implied that much himself. She would mail it to Phil

Martin in the morning. She did not, of course, know where he lived; he had the advantage of her in that particular—she smiled a little icily—but the *Herald-Star* was his business address, and mail would reach him there.

She started on along the street, but she walked slowly now, thinking, her eyes on the figure of Shive Frank, whom she could still see hurrying down the street ahead of her. Suppose Shive Frank got into telephone communication with Phil Martin during the night, or even in the morning? Phil Martin would not have received the photograph by then, and sometime to-morrow morning he would undoubtedly make that call upon her as Shive Frank had said. Well, after all, what did it matter? If there was ever to be any intimacy between them at all she would have to receive him sooner or later. The present situation was impossible. She *was* displeased with Phil Martin, but, the first flush of irritation having passed, not very seriously so. It was only because something unexpected had happened. She had to acknowledge she had not given the matter a second thought in the Gondola when he had admitted that on one occasion at least Shive Frank had been with him when he had followed her. She would, however, not let it pass when he called to-morrow morning. Oh, so he *was* calling! Then why mail the photograph? If she was to be logical she would wait and give it to him when he came—he would receive it that much sooner. But,

of course, she could 'phone him that she *had* mailed it—in which case he wouldn't come at all. She bit at her lips in a rush of confusion, and the colour was in her cheeks again.

She turned her head suddenly. A car behind her had swung around the corner from Third Avenue at a furious pace. It swept past her now with a roar, its headlights streaming down the street. She stared after it in a startled, fascinated way. She had seen none of its occupants; and, due to the sudden glare of its lights and the speed at which it was travelling, she could not have given the slightest description of the car itself.

She followed it with her eyes. As it approached Second Avenue it seemed to slow a little and swerve in toward the curb; and, as it swerved, its headlights picked out a lone figure on the sidewalk. That would be Shive Frank, of course. There had been no one else on the street, and, in fact, though he had become shadowy in the distance, she had never quite lost sight of him. Now Shive Frank appeared to start running at top speed. Strange!

Mechanically, she could not have told why, she began to hurry herself. And then, with a low, strained cry, she stood stock-still. Vicious spurts of flame were cutting through the semidarkness from the side of the car, and now she could hear the crackle of a fusillade of shots. It seemed to have happened instantaneously —quicker than thought. The car had never stopped

—and now it was tearing across Second Avenue—and now she could no longer see it. Shive Frank! Intuitively she knew what had happened. The warning he had spoken of had reached him too late!

She caught her breath in a horror-stricken gasp, and started to run toward the corner. There seemed to be an insensate orgy of this sort of thing in New York. It wasn't so many nights ago that, in full view of the stream of pedestrians that was passing to and fro, they had even shot down a man in the theatre district of Broadway, where it was as bright as day. It was hideous.

She ran on impulsively, blindly. It could have taken her but little more than a minute to reach the corner; but, as if by magic, Second Avenue had already supplied a small crowd, and this was constantly being augmented. People were rushing to the spot from all directions. The number of those congregated, however, was not as yet so great but that she could see.

It was Shive Frank who lay there motionless on the sidewalk. She had had no doubt of that from the moment the shots had been fired, but she felt her face whiten now. It was not a pleasant sight. Just a few minutes ago this crumpled heap had been alive. The man had been repugnant to her, but now she knew only pity and a tigerish resentment in the face of callous and cold-blooded murder. And this was the most cowardly of all types of murder. Taken un-

awares and shot down by men afraid to give their victim even a chance to defend himself! Her lips curled in bitter contempt. Brave men, these gangsters and racketeers!

Dead? Was Shive Frank dead? How did she know? Perhaps he was only wounded and unconscious. What were they saying?

Three or four men were bending over the prone figure on the sidewalk. She was being jostled, pressed closer, by the newcomers to the scene. Everybody was talking—morbidly, excitedly, hysterically, some in awe-struck tones:

"Who did it? . . . How did it happen? . . . Took him for a ride, eh? . . . Is he alive? . . . I seen de car dat done it. . . . God rest his soul! . . . Some nifty job, I'll tell de world! . . ."

One of the men got up from the sidewalk and brushed his knees nervously. He delivered his verdict with twisted lips.

"Croaked? Sure, he's croaked! They splashed him plenty. He's a sieve, see—just a damn sieve!" He laughed raucously.

"Don't nobody know who he is?" wailed a woman's voice.

Half a dozen voices answered at once; one rose above the others:

"I'll say I know him! It's Shive Frank out on his last long vacation from the Big House—that's who he is!"

Both the man's words and voice jangled—callously, horribly out of tune. Perhaps it wasn't intentional. Perhaps it was only nerves. Enid shivered, and began to edge her way back out of the crowd. Here was the patrolman on post, breathless from his run of possibly a block away. Pretty soon there would be a car from district detective headquarters. Questions! There wasn't anything she could tell that would be of any immediate value. Shive Frank had already been identified. Others had seen the car, and had seen the shooting at closer range than she had.

She did not want to be questioned—not to-night, anyhow. The girl who had been with Shive Frank just before he was shot! The reporters would make a lot of that. Headlines! Would the story of the photograph be of any value to the police? The police might think so, anyway. They would certainly ask her to go over to the station house. They would want to see the photograph. It was in her bag. So was an automatic. Suppose they saw that, too! Under the circumstances they would be suspicious at once. Of what? Anything! Everything! A steer for the gang that had killed Shive Frank, for instance. She would be a marked woman until they had probed her past and present to the point where they could probe no more—and then still be suspicious!

No, decidedly not to-night! And, besides, it would bring Phil Martin into the affair. Before she said anything she would consult with him. If he thought

it necessary, that it had any bearing on Shive Frank's murder, he could tell the story of the photograph to the police far better and more intimately than she could, or, in any case, prevent any undue publicity being given to her.

It was only a few steps to the small, somewhat dingy house in which she lived. Indeed, the crowd had become so great now that, overflowing the corner, its outer fringe reached almost to her doorway. She gained the stoop, and stood for a moment looking around her. How they pushed and milled—like animals scenting blood! An unkempt urchin had climbed to a point of vantage on the standard of a street lamp. There was noise, confusion, the chatter of a multitude of tongues. She heard the clang of an ambulance or police wagon around the corner—probably the latter, for the next instant came sharp, barked orders to disperse. The crowd suddenly surged backward. She hurriedly opened the door and let herself in.

The house was in darkness. She passed along the hall, opened a door, and, switching on the light, entered a modestly furnished bedroom. Her temples were throbbing. Her hat felt like a band of tight-drawn steel. She almost tore it from her head. Her mind was in riot. The thing had shaken her. She drew her hands across her eyes, fighting for composure.

Yes, now she was quite all right again. She pulled out a bureau drawer and, opening her bag, took out

the automatic. The brown paper wrapper fell to the floor. She noticed that the elastic band had gone. It had probably rubbed against the automatic while she was running. She tucked the automatic away under a pile of lingerie in the drawer, closed the drawer, and picked up the brown paper wrapper. It became unfolded as she lifted it. There was nothing inside. She knitted her brows in a puzzled way. Had the photograph slipped out when Shive Frank had dropped the wrapper on the sidewalk? That could hardly be, for, though it had obviously been insecurely wrapped, she would have noticed it. In her bag, then? Had it slipped out in there? She looked hastily in the bag. Yes, here it was!

The Big Shot! She looked at it curiously. It had obviously been a snapshot of a group, but now both ends were cut off, and only one face and figure remained. A very clear and distinct photograph for a snapshot, she thought.

And then suddenly she stared more closely at the photograph, stared at it for a long time with widened eyes. There was noise outside, the police were still dispersing the crowd; inside the room there was no sound save for a low, broken cry that was like a sob.

"The Big Shot . . . the Big Shot . . . the Big Shot . . ." The words were repeating themselves over and over, racing like some ghastly refrain through her brain.

The Big Shot—the man at whose doors untold

crimes were laid! A gangster, a racketeer, a thief, a smirched thing—oh, God, perhaps a murderer!

And standing there in front of the bureau, she saw herself in the mirror. No, not herself. It was someone she had never seen before. Strange dark eyes that were full of pain and terror burned back at her out of a bloodless, ashen face, a face that was like a ghost's.

The photograph fluttered to the bureau top. She shut her eyes, and swayed a little.

The Big Shot was her brother.

CHAPTER III

After Midnight

REACTION came. Every faculty she possessed rose up in fierce denial. It looked like Roy. She did not believe any two human beings could look so much alike; but, then, this was only a photograph, and a snapshot at that. And, besides, Roy was dead. Dead! How did she know? She had never been sure of that. She had never, even now after all these years, quite given up hope.

She looked dully around her for a moment; then, with a sudden tightening of her lips, she picked up the snapshot and, opening the door of a connecting room, entered the latter and switched on the light. From between portraits of her mother and father on the mantelpiece she took down a cabinet-sized, silver-framed photograph of a smiling, dark-eyed, clear-cut young soldier in Canadian uniform, and carried it to a flat-topped desk that stood in the centre of the room. Here she pushed to one side a typewriter and some sheets of manuscript, laid the snapshot and the framed photograph on the desk beside each other, and sat down in front of them.

Her eyes filled suddenly with tears. Roy! They

had been such chums. He had been older, of course—but not so very much older. He had been too young when the war broke out to go over with the first Canadian contingent; but he had enlisted the day he had become old enough to do so. She had been so proud of him. That was all she had ever shown him—her pride in him. Young as she had been, she had never let him see her tears. He had gone over in 'seventeen—that was twelve years ago. She had been not quite thirteen then, and he eighteen.

He had never come back. Just a few months before the Armistice he had been reported missing. "Missing!" "Killed in action" would have been easier to bear. "Missing!" There was something unutterably cruel in that, a more poignant grief, a grief that time would not heal, a grief that fruitless hope kept alive. It had hastened her mother's end. Even to the last, with her bed drawn to the window, her mother had watched the street. "Roy would come. Roy would come," she had insisted. But Roy had never come. "Missing!" That was all.

Had he come now—*like this?* The tears were gone, and in their place a frightened look was in her eyes. She was afraid, terribly afraid that, in spite of the fact it couldn't possibly be true, it—it—— Her mind seemed to falter. What was she trying to tell herself? That Roy, her brother, that fearless, clean kid she had adored and worshipped, *might* be this crook and criminal the police were seeking? Well, it wasn't

true! Her clenched hands beat upon the desk. It wasn't true!

She grew calmer. It could do her no possible good to give way like this. She bent over the photographs and began to study and compare them critically. There was a difference in years, of course, but the same distinctive features were there. And then suddenly she laughed a little unnaturally. Surely she did not need to compare photographs in order to recognize her own brother!

She drew the snapshot closer to her and, with the aid of a reading glass which she took from a drawer in the desk, studied it intently for several minutes. Her hand was unsteady, trembling a little, as she finally laid down the glass. The "enlargement" had only verified her first impression. She was convinced that it was Roy.

Her elbows were on the table now, her head tightly clasped in her hands. How her temples throbbed! Like hammer blows that brought physical hurt! She stared straight before her.

Granting that it was Roy, it didn't mean that he was what they said he was, that he was a much-sought-after criminal, that he was the Big Shot whom Phil Martin was so eager to trap. *That,* on the face of it, was an absurdity. Roy *couldn't* be a criminal. There was some mistake somewhere. Shive Frank had admittedly been a miserable scoundrel. His word was worth nothing!

And yet—one hand dragged itself heavily across her forehead—why should Shive Frank have singled out an innocent man? And how, unless they had in some way been brought together, would a photograph of Roy be in the possession of a man of Shive Frank's stamp? Shive Frank had said that it was a snapshot of a group. It obviously had been. But both ends had been cut off, and only Roy remained. Shive Frank, who had claimed to be in the original picture, would, in such case, very naturally use the scissors before turning the snapshot over to a newspaper. In one sense this bore out his contention that he had been one of the group; on the other hand, it might mean he had simply destroyed the evidence that would have proved he was lying—that it might have been a snapshot of a perfectly innocent little group of friends. But how, then, in the first place, had Shive Frank obtained a picture in which Roy was included?

But that was not all. There—there was something else. She sat quite still now fighting for self-control. This *was* a picture of Roy. She felt sure of it, certain of it. In her mind there lingered not a single doubt. *Therefore Roy was alive.* He had not only not been killed in France, but he had been here on this side of the water, in America, for at least several years. The snapshot itself certainly bore out one of Shive Frank's statements—that it had been taken three or four years ago. Why, then, had Roy never come home to the mother who was watching and waiting

for him, to the father who sorrowed and who at that time had still been alive, to her who loved him so dearly? To them all—to his own people—to turn sadness into joy? Why had he never written? Why had there been neither word nor sign from him to those who grieved and mourned his loss?—the while he was alive and well in New York!

Like a crushed thing her head went down on the desk and was buried in her arms. Her shoulders shook convulsively.

"I don't believe it!" she moaned. "I will never believe it—never, never, never—until I have found him, seen him with my own eyes, and—and he himself has told me it is true!"

The black moment passed.

Find him! Yes, she would find him! She rose impulsively to her feet, her head thrown back, her eyes alight with resolution. The game in a sense was all in her own hands. Shive Frank would never telephone to Phil Martin now, and Phil Martin would never know she had the photograph—and neither would the police! Both the police and Phil Martin must be kept out of this until she had found Roy.

Her brows knitted suddenly together. And then—what? If Roy really proved to be the Big Shot? She shook her head. She refused to answer that, even to consider it. One bridge at a time! She had not found Roy yet. The matter of the immediate moment was to search for him.

Well, she was free to do that. There was no one to question her comings or her goings. For another two weeks, anyway, she would be alone here in this house.

Her eyes fell upon the scattered sheets of manuscript beside the typewriter. A queer, tight smile crept across her lips. Strange that this should have come about directly through her work! Three years ago her mother had died; less than a year ago her father had died. She had not wanted to live alone in the old home in Winnipeg any more, even if she had been able to maintain it, which the modest competence she had inherited, though quite sufficient for her personal needs, would not have permitted in any case. She had written a few, a very few, obscure short stories. She had made up her mind to do something more ambitious—a book. And then it had become a question of some place to go, where she could devote herself to her work. She had thought of Martha Debbins. Martha had been in the household so many years, both as Roy's and her nurse and in other capacities, that she had become almost like one of the family. Those childhood years were indissolubly associated with Martha. Then Martha had married and gone to live in New York. But she had never lost touch with Martha. Always at Christmas she had sent little gifts, and there had been an exchange of letters.

Martha had seemed to solve the problems from

all angles, for, from everything she, Enid, had heard and read, New York's East Side, with its colourful mingling of all nationalities and reflecting so many variant and intense phases of life, had appealed to her strongly as a setting for a book—and she had, of course, known Martha's circumstances intimately before she had written asking if she might come to board with her old nurse until the book was written. Martha's husband had been dead for a number of years. He had been a small tradesman, and had left her this little house she lived in, and almost enough to get along on. For the rest, Martha was an excellent seamstress, and so she and her two little girls—now eight and ten years of age respectively—managed very comfortably indeed. Martha had welcomed her, Enid's, suggestion with eager enthusiasm, and so—well, she was here.

Martha was away now with her children on a visit to some of her deceased husband's relations on the Maine coast. That was why of late she, Enid, had been frequenting the cafés and restaurants so much, taking her meals at perhaps unusual hours, but at hours which, with no one but herself to consider, she had made to fit in with her moods for work; and that was why, too, there was no one to question and no one to know what she did or where she went in the present circumstances.

She glanced at her wrist watch. One o'clock. It seemed incredible that it was no later than that—

that it was only half an hour since she had left Phil Martin in the Gondola—that in that half hour Shive Frank had been murdered, and this cataclysmic thing had come into her life!

She laughed out a little—suddenly, unnaturally. What did it matter that it had been merely half an hour! All that mattered was that it was still not too late to do something now, at once—to begin her search for Roy to-night. Not to-morrow—now! There was more than one reason for instant action. One was outstanding. Apart from the urge of her own feelings, and the fact that she had a possible clue to follow which was more likely to be successful in the night hours than in the daylight, it was vital that she should find Roy *before* Phil Martin did.

Her head drooped a little. Before Phil Martin did! Somehow that brought an added pang. Her head came up again courageously. *Yes*—before Phil Martin did! Well, she had as much to go on as Phil Martin had; the same clue—and more. All Phil Martin knew was what Shive Frank had told him about the gang that had a rendezvous at Izzy Myers's; but, with Shive Frank dead and the photograph in her possession, Phil Martin would be hard put to it to identify the man he was after—even if the Big Shot ever went to Izzy Myers's place in person, which Shive Frank had admitted was extremely doubtful.

It was a slender clue, but it was the only one she had. The one thing she could do now was to go to

Izzy Myers's place on First Avenue. Her brows furrowed. A voice within told her it was a perilous, impossible thing for a girl to do at such an hour as this. She smiled gravely. Perilous—yes; impossible—no! But she could not let the risk of peril to herself hold her back where Roy was concerned; and there was nothing impossible about it.

It was the single chance she had. She had come to know the neighbourhood well, and she knew approximately where Izzy Myers's junk shop was—not more than four or five blocks away. She did not expect to find Roy there from what Shive Frank had said, but there might be some of the gang present through whom she could obtain another clue that would lead her to Roy himself. How? What did she intend to do? Walk in on the gang? She shook her head almost angrily. She did not know what she would do until she got there; she only knew that it was the one possible starting point she had. That was sufficient for the moment.

Well, she had better go, then, hadn't she?—the minutes were flying! She picked up the snapshot and the photograph in the silver frame, and, carrying them into her bedroom, locked them in her trunk. There would be no portraits of Roy in evidence anywhere! It might be exaggerated caution to lock the framed photo away, too, but it was at least safer that way.

And now she restored the automatic to her hand-

bag and stood for a moment inspecting herself critically in the mirror. The result satisfied her. She was all in black, naturally—her father's death had been very recent—and she was therefore as inconspicuously dressed as she could be. She could do nothing more in that respect.

She extinguished the lights and let herself out, locking the front door behind her; and then, standing on the stoop, she looked around her. The crowd had gone. There was no sign of the tragedy of a little while ago. But for an instant she hesitated. Another thought had come to her. Suppose Phil Martin went to Izzy Myers's to-night, too—it was his as well as her only chance! No—he would go there some time, no doubt, but it was hardly likely that it would be to-night—he would be too much occupied with Shive Frank's murder. But *if* he did?

She lifted her shoulders in a grim little fatalistic way, and, descending the stoop, started to walk quickly toward First Avenue. That was another risk she would have to take!

CHAPTER IV

The Lair

First Avenue was quiet. There were not many pedestrians about, but Enid was twice obliged to pass the unlighted windows and closed front door of Izzy Myers's junk shop before the way was clear to explore the lane, or driveway, that, flanking one side of the junk shop, obviously led to the rear of the premises. Then, satisfied that there was no longer anyone near enough to observe her movements, she slipped quickly into the lane.

And then, instinctively, she halted. Here, a few paces in from the street, it was as though she had been suddenly confronted with an impenetrable wall of blackness. She could see nothing and the blackness was ugly. In one sense she realized that this afforded her a certain protection; but she had never before realized that the darkness possessed a psychological terror that was all its own. Her heart was beating furiously. She told herself she was not very brave.

What was beyond the darkness at the other end of this lane? The front of the junk shop was shut and dark. Was there anyone in the back part? Or was

it a night when the whole place was deserted by everybody? She had believed that there was more likelihood of the gang's congregating here at night than in broad daylight. She still believed so. That was why, apart from her anxiety to forestall Phil Martin, she had not dared let the night slip away from her without doing her utmost to turn it to account.

Her lips firmed. She might be afraid, just as any other girl might be under like circumstances, but at least she was not a coward. Since there was nothing to be seen in front, the rear of the premises had to be explored or there would have been no use in coming here at all. She reached out with her hand through the darkness, touched the wall of the house, and, guiding herself thereby, stepped resolutely forward again.

But now she walked cautiously, striving to make no noise. It seemed a long way, and the darkness seemed to become constantly even more opaque. Doubts began to assail her. Suppose the gang *were* here, what could she do? The phrase repeated itself —what could she do? Here she was—a girl—alone—baiting a criminal lair! Impulse had brought her, and the situation was absurd. What, for instance, was she going to do with this automatic that she had taken from her handbag?

And then, suddenly, angrily, she flung the doubts aside. She wasn't fair to herself. It wasn't impulse

that had brought her here—it was Roy. And there might be very little hope of success—but it wasn't absurd. There *was* a chance that there would be something she might hear, or see, or do—and she had taken it. She would take it again to-morrow if need be, and all the to-morrows thereafter; take any chance, do anything, risk anything, grasp at any straw to find Roy.

Her lips were moving silently.

"Oh, Roy! What does it mean? What could it mean? Roy! Roy!"

She came to an abrupt stop. She had reached the end of the wall and had mechanically turned the corner of the house. Someone *was* here. Her heart began to pound again, but it was with excitement now, not fear. Before her she could see chinks of light from the shuttered windows on the ground floor.

She glanced swiftly around her. It was not so dark here as it had been in the lane. She was in an open space—the yard, of course—the junk yard. Objects showed up in irregular outline. That was a cart over there. And the rear entrance to the house was obviously through an extension built out at right angles into the yard. That was why she was facing those two lighted windows. Voices reached her, muffled, the words indistinguishable.

The windows were only a few steps in front of her, and she began to make her way on tiptoe toward

the one from which the voices emanated—the one nearer the rear of the extension. As she approached the voices became more distinct and were intermingled with frequent and curious little rattling and thumping sounds—and she was suddenly grateful that it was a hot, breathless night, which accounted for the window behind the closed shutters being open, as it obviously must have been to enable her to hear anything at all. And now she could see that the shutters were in bad repair, and that some of the slats were askew where the chinks of light seeped through.

The ground was uneven and strewn with all sorts of rubbish. It was not easy for her to pick her way. She had already tripped over something once, though without making any noise; and now, within a yard of the window, she tripped again. A small stone rolled over beneath her foot. In her own ears it made a thunderous sound. She felt the colour leave her face. She waited breathlessly. Nothing! She rallied herself. This wouldn't do! She couldn't afford to become even a little bit panicky. Common sense told her that the sound had been so slight it couldn't possibly have been heard from within. She forced a facetious little smile to her lips. She had stalked big game in the darkness before without losing her head, hadn't she? Then surely she could do it again!

The next instant she was standing at the window. The sill was shoulder high. She peered in through

the slats where they were out of alignment. There were five men inside there throwing dice against a raised board on a table. That was the rattling and thumping sound she had heard. Craps! Her education had gone that far—thanks, in this particular, to Phil Martin, who had explained the game to her. In an almost startled way she turned her head from the window and looked around her in the darkness. Always Phil Martin! She had even had to face the possibility of his coming here, too, to-night! For the moment she had forgotten that—but, at any rate, there had been no sign of him, nor was there any now.

She peered in again through the slats. The five men were in shirt sleeves, not a pleasant-looking crowd, though most of them were young. One of them had a thin and almost abnormally pasty-white face—a drug addict, she decided. Some of them laughed as they played, but there was nothing pleasant in their laughter, either—it was raucous, coarse, hardened, intermingled with blasphemy. There was a great deal of money changing hands. With their coats off, the holster at each man's belt was plainly in evidence.

Her eyes swept around the room—what she could see of it. As a hangout it had the appearance of innocence itself. It was apparently nothing but a storeroom for junk. Izzy Myers, it would seem, bought and sold and dealt in every conceivable manner of thing from rugs and old carpets to decrepit furniture,

stoves, and battered tin washboilers. These articles and countless others of the same ilk were littered about everywhere. There were two doors in the room, one at either end. Both were closed. The one at the lower end opened, of course, on the yard, and made the rear entrance to the disreputable establishment; and, patently, the door at the upper end opened into an inner room.

She nodded her head sharply. That was the other room through whose shuttered window she had also seen chinks of light. What was in there?

She moved stealthily along the side of the wall, and reached the second window. Her view here was even less obstructed than before—some of the slats were even more askew than at the first window. This window also was open.

Izzy Myers himself! She had never seen Izzy Myers, but there was no mistaking the proprietor of the junk shop in the present surroundings. He was speaking excitedly into a telephone that stood on the grime-streaked, flat-topped desk at which he was seated.

". . . Sure, they are! . . . Yes, both of 'em. . . . Oh, he's all right, no worse than usual. . . . What? . . ."

Then followed the sharp, sibilant sound of Izzy Myers's breath being drawn greedily in through his bearded lips.

Enid stared in through the slats.

Izzy Myers's eyes were greedy, too—little black eyes that were dancing exultantly. But now there was silence in the room. Izzy Myers wasn't talking any more—just listening, listening intently, interminably.

She inspected the room—Izzy Myers probably dignified it by the name of office. It was less littered than the other room, but equally dirty. It possessed two uninviting-looking chairs besides the one in which Izzy Myers sat. There was a safe in one corner that had lost most of its paint. There was a dirty account book open on the desk, at which Izzy Myers had presumably been working when the telephone call had disturbed his labours. Even from where she stood she could see that the writing was crude and scrawled, and that there were several ink blots on the paper.

She was studying Izzy Myers himself now. In spite of the filth and disorder that were his background, and the dirty, ill-fitting clothes he wore, there was something incongruous about the man. A vagrant thought obtruded itself. If it were only material for her book that she was after to-night! She could readily picture Izzy Myers going about his business as a fawning and obsequious Jew peddler, but there was nothing about him to indicate anything of that sort now. As he sat there at the 'phone he was alert and tense. There was cunning in his bearded face, but there was something more. Something that she could not quite define unless it were to say that he exuded a sort of ugly efficiency. In the few words she

had heard he had not spoken particularly like a Jew, either. He at once repelled and interested her. She was conscious of the feeling that he was no ordinary man, and that he and his junk shop camouflaged far more than a mere hangout for a few gangsters. Neither did she think he was as old as that crooked back, those round, drooping shoulders, that unkempt shock of white hair, and that brown beard flecked with gray made him look—in any case, he couldn't be more than somewhere in the middle fifties, she believed.

He was still listening at the 'phone—listening eagerly. And he was smiling now—not mirthfully, but with a sort of oily rapaciousness. What was it about? It must be something of unusual importance. Of course it hadn't been as long as it had seemed, but——

He was suddenly speaking again—nodding his head vigorously at his unseen auditor as though to add emphasis to his words:

"I get you all the way! It's a killing! Sure, they'll both be there! I'll give 'em the dope. Anything else? . . . No? All right! Good luck!"

He replaced the receiver on the hook, got up briskly from the desk, and opened the door connecting with the other room where the crap game was in progress.

"You, there, Skinny, and you, too, Maloch," he

called, "cut that out, and come on in here! I want to see you."

Without waiting for a reply, he went back to the desk and sat down.

Enid's eyes were on the connecting doorway now, and a moment later the thin, pale-faced young man, whom she had already classified as a drug addict, came into the room with one of his companions.

"Shut the door, Skinny," directed Izzy Myers.

"What's up?" demanded the pale-faced young man as he obeyed.

Izzy Myers grinned, and rubbed his hands together avariciously.

"A lot!" he answered. "There's plenty busting loose in this little old burg to-night. I been talking on the 'phone."

"Yeh?" It was the other man—Maloch—who spoke now. "Some more about Shive Frank?"

Izzy Myers shook his head somewhat impatiently.

"What's there more to hear about him? It's only the cops that'll buzz their heads off—and they got a hot chance! Listen! I just been talking to the Big Shot, and he wants you two birds for a little job he's pulling personally before the cold gray dawn beats him to it."

"Him? Personally? With us?" Skinny circled his lips with his tongue excitedly. "Is that straight?"

"Sure, it's straight, and he asked for you two guys particular. You, Skinny, 'cause you're pretty slick

with locks, I guess; and Maloch 'cause he's the handiest of the bunch with his rod if it's needed. D'ye think I'm handing you a steer?"

Instinctively Enid drew back a little from the shutter. The pounding of her heart sounded so loud to her that it seemed as though they must have heard it, too. The Big Shot! They were talking about the Big Shot. These two men were to keep a rendezvous with him to-night.

"Oh, go on! Go on!" she pleaded silently under her breath.

"Spill it!" invited Maloch tersely.

Izzy Myers smiled cryptically.

"Well, the short of it is that Twisty Morgan and his mob pulled a big jewel break to-night and got away with it—but they didn't get far away."

"Yeh?" Maloch's eyes narrowed. "Twisty's lucky! He's lived six months longer now than I'd have bet on! Him and his gang of double-crossing skunks! We owe him plenty, and he'd oughter got the spot to square it long ago! It's been coming to him since last winter! Is that what we do to-night? Say, it'll make me happy. I've been feeling sore about the delay."

Skinny coughed rackingly from his thin chest.

"To hell with Twisty! What'd you say about the break? Where was it?"

"I don't know—somewhere downtown," Izzy Myers answered. "You'll read all about it in the

morning papers along with Shive Frank. What counts is that they had to stage their getaway in a hurry with no time to make the split, and the Big Shot knows where the stuff is parked."

"And where's that?" inquired Skinny eagerly.

Izzy Myers dropped a secretive eyelid.

"The Big Shot wasn't talking for publication over the 'phone, and he didn't say. But he slipped me a hint that'll maybe give you the low-down on it. Don't Twisty's old dame live up somewhere around here, and ain't she supposed to have fired Twisty out of the house a couple of years ago 'cause he was a bad egg and a disgrace to his poor old widowed mother?"

"Sure, she does!" growled Maloch viciously. "But her firing Twisty out is the bunk. She's worse than he is, but the only reason for that is that he's young yet, and his education ain't finished the way hers is. If you ask me, this erring son and sorrowing mamma stuff ain't nothing but a blind, and the police have fell for it, and got it handed to them lots. Blast the two of 'em! I know 'em; and I know where her place is. She just puts up a front."

"Is it anywhere near Eightieth and Second Avenue?" asked Izzy Myers softly.

"If that's a guess, it's a good one," Maloch grunted.

Izzy Myers rubbed his hands together unctuously.

"Well, that's the answer, then," he said. "The Big Shot said you two was to meet him at the foot of the

'L' steps at Eightieth and Second in as near around half an hour as you could. Skinny, you'd better load up with what door tools you need, and then beat it. And tell the boys out there to stick around in case anything busts bad and they're wanted. You got plenty of time, 'cause the less you're seen hanging around up there waiting for someone the better. Ride the ozone up and it'll be just about right, and you'll look natural coming down the steps when you get there. See? There ain't——"

Enid heard no more. She was stealing back across the junk yard. In the lane she broke into a run. She ran again on the cross street, making for Second Avenue, whenever she was sure she was not observed. She kept on curiously telling herself the same thing over and over again:

That the Big Shot would be at Eightieth Street and Second Avenue in half an hour—no, less than half an hour! And that she must get there before those two men did, or they would all have gone away, and she would not be able to see with her own eyes if—if the Big Shot was really Roy. And that she must hurry—hurry—hurry!

CHAPTER V

The Blood Call

IZZY MYERS had told the two men to "ride the ozone" uptown. One did not have to be deeply versed in the vernacular to understand what he had meant. Skinny and Maloch were to go up to Eightieth Street on the elevated.

The nearest elevated station on the Second Avenue line, for them as for herself, was at Sixty-fifth Street. She reached this and, by running up the stairs, barely managed to catch an uptown train before it pulled out.

A little breathless from her exertions, she sat down in the first vacant seat nearest the door. She had not been in time, of course, to see who had got on the train besides herself; but she did not think that Skinny and Maloch could have reached Sixty-fifth Street ahead of her. She glanced quickly now over the occupants of the car—they were not many, and Skinny and Maloch were certainly not among them. It was possible, naturally, that they might be in one of the the other cars, but it was not likely. In any case there was no need to make herself conspicuous by walking

through the train to find out. She would know quickly enough when she got to Eightieth Street.

She tried to compose herself, tried to think calmly. It seemed ages since she had been accosted by Shive Frank; and it seemed as though she had been living from that moment in a world of terrifying and ugly unreality. It was so hard to think—to think rationally. And besides, subconsciously, she knew that she was almost afraid to think. In just a few minutes she would see this gang leader and criminal that they called the Big Shot. What would she do if he *were* Roy? What would she do if he were not? The Big Shot and Skinny and Maloch were about to commit a crime. True, gang war entered into it, and it was a rival gang that they were planning to rob of ill-gotten gains, of jewels that had already been stolen; but that did not make it any the less a crime—it only added to the total number of thieves. It had not occurred to her before that with this foreknowledge of a proposed crime in her possession she was thus faced with a moral responsibility she could not evade —but the realization of this fact came to her now with stunning force.

The train stopped at Seventy-second Street and went on again. The next stop was Eightieth Street.

If he were Roy, how would she explain her presence there to him? Her handbag was on her lap; she put her hands to her head as though to adjust her hat—but her hands pressed fiercely against her temples.

Oh, she was beginning to think now, to think too clearly. She could not bring Phil Martin into this.

The minutes passed. The train began to slacken speed.

"I don't know," she whispered piteously to herself. "I don't know what I shall do. Just the best I can."

At Eightieth Street she got out. No one else did. Her question was answered. She was undoubtedly here ahead of Skinny and Maloch.

As the train roared away, leaving her alone on the platform, she stood for an instant hesitant. Was the Big Shot waiting down there at the foot of the stairs, or was she too early—not only ahead of the two men but ahead of the specified half hour as well?

She walked across the platform to where she could see the length of the stairway leading up from the street. There was no one below there—no one in sight. The neighbourhood seemed to be absolutely deserted. No—she was wrong! There *was* someone there—a figure lounging in the shadows near the corner.

She drew back abruptly from the rail of the platform. The figure had come more into the light. It was neither a lounger nor the Big Shot. She caught the glint of metal buttons. It was the patrolman on post.

She pursed her lips. At this hour of night the trains did not run very frequently. She would probably have

quite a few minutes to wait before the arrival of Skinny and Maloch. She, a girl, at this hour, could not loiter around down there without inviting the officer's attention—and it would be worse still if she were discovered crouching in a doorway in an attempt to keep out of sight! The only thing to do was to stay up here until Skinny and Maloch arrived, and then follow them down to the street. There was no one here but the man in the ticket office. He probably had not seen her, and was hardly likely to say anything to her in any case; but, should he do so, she had only to say that she had mistaken the station and was waiting for the next uptown train.

A sense of eeriness suddenly assailed her. How silent the city had become! How strange and lonely it was up here! There was scarcely a glimmer to be seen in any of the upper windows of the houses and buildings, and the elevated structure seemed to have blotted out the street lights.

That policeman down there! Instead of trying to avoid him, couldn't she use him as a solution ready to hand for that newly sensed problem of moral responsibility? But there was Roy! Was she deliberately trying to torture herself? She must first know whether it was Roy or not. It it were Roy she would plead with him, persuade him not to do this thing. There would be no need then for the police.

A long time passed—it seemed an endless time. And then as she saw and heard an uptown train ap-

proaching she took up her position as near the exit as she could be without standing obtrusively in the light—and waited.

The train stopped. Yes, here were Skinny and Maloch! There was only one other passenger—a woman with a child in her arms.

All three came hurrying toward the exit, the woman close at the heels of the two men. Enid stepped a little farther into the shadows and allowed them to pass by her—and then she began to follow them down the stairs. She was grateful for the woman's presence. Skinny and Maloch, she was sure, had not noticed her, and now the woman screened her from observation. She did not want to get too close to Skinny and Maloch until they were joined by the Big Shot. The one thing she must not do was to give them an inkling that they were watched—or the rendezvous would probably never be kept at all.

And then, when halfway down the stairs, she saw a man's form appear on the sidewalk—a man who walked rapidly by toward the foot of the stairs. She caught her breath. She was too high up and the light was too poor to see his face; and, besides, not only had he passed too quickly, but his hat was pulled down over his eyes—yet she was instantly conscious of an intensive sense of familiarity. It seemed to stab at her, to hurt like a sudden knife thrust. That walk, the man's carriage, the swing of arms and shoulders, the poise of his head!

"Roy!" she called out brokenly.

There was no answer—no attention paid to her. The man had gone by. She looked swiftly down the stairs over the shoulders of the woman in front of her. Skinny and Maloch had descended much more quickly than had the woman burdened with the child. They were just stepping out on the sidewalk now, and—yes, the third man had joined them. Not one of them had paused. And now they were walking rapidly away in an uptown direction—and she couldn't see them any more.

She was still on the stairway where the angle of the roofing over the stairs hid everything except a few feet of the sidewalk in the direction in which they had gone. She brushed past the woman in front of her, and ran down the remaining steps. And then, gaining the sidewalk, she could see what had been hidden from her before—just a few yards away a car was standing at the curb. The three men were getting into it.

"Roy! Roy! Roy!" she called again, but the only answer was the splutter of the car's exhaust as it leaped forward, heading up the avenue.

Mechanically she ran after the car at top speed—and it was not until she was a quarter way up the block that, realizing the futility of what she was doing, she came to a halt and, in an agony of dismay and anxiety, strained her eyes after the car. There was no traffic, and, standing there, she kept the car in sight until it

swung off the avenue at the first cross street and disappeared from view.

There was a sob in her throat as she turned then in indecision and looked around her. The woman with the child had gone along Eightieth Street, no doubt. There was no sign of the policeman. The only evidence of life on the avenue was a lighted store window on the opposite side near Eighty-first Street where the car had vanished—an all-night quick lunch probably.

She swayed a little, and in a curious, groping way felt out for the nearest doorway and leaned against it for support. She wasn't going to faint, was she? She laughed at herself bitterly. She had never done such a thing in her life—but she felt strangely ill and physically weak. She would be all right in a minute, of course. It—it was just the cumulative effect of everything that had happened to-night, beginning with Shive Frank's murder and—and ending like this —as though fate jeered and laughed at her.

True, she had seen the Big Shot, but was it Roy? She had thought it was. In general appearance he had looked so much like Roy that she had instantly called out to him, called his name. But she had not seen his face. She was not sure.

Tears were in her eyes. Her lips trembled. She did not want to be sure. There was still a chance that it wasn't Roy. If it had been Roy surely he would at least have turned his head when he heard his name.

He *had* heard her, he could not have helped but hear her when she had called to him from the elevated steps. Afterward, the noise of the car might have drowned out her voice, but he must have heard her the first time, and if it had been Roy he would——

Oh, yes, she knew she was trying to argue herself into the belief that it wasn't Roy, because, if it was Roy, then Roy was a criminal. But there was a leaden weight upon her heart, because she was conscious that deep down in her soul she felt there was very little room for doubt.

And now, with a crime impending, and whether it was Roy or not, she had missed her chance. The Big Shot was gone. She did not know where Twisty Morgan's mother lived. She only knew from what Izzy Myers and Maloch had said that it was somewhere in this neighbourhood. But she didn't know where. She had no way of picking up the Big Shot's trail again. She had failed, and——

Failed! No, she hadn't failed—not yet! Why was she wasting precious time cowering in this doorway like a whimpering child? Yes—she remembered. She had felt quite ill for a moment. But she wasn't ill any more. There was a great deal she could do to pick up the Big Shot's trail again. To begin with, there was that store, which she thought was an all-night quick lunch, whose lighted window she had noticed on the opposite side of the avenue. They might be able to tell her in there where Twisty Morgan's

mother lived. That was all she needed to know. She would try there first, anyhow.

She stepped out on the pavement and was about to cross over to the other side of the avenue when she paused abruptly. Up at the end of the block, on the same side of the avenue as herself, three men were just rounding the corner of Eighty-first Street and were coming in her direction.

Her heart suddenly began to beat faster. Three men! There was no one else to be seen on the avenue. Just those three men. They had come from the same corner around which the car had disappeared. They were too far away, and the light was too poor to identify them positively—but identification of any specific nature was unnecessary. She knew intuitively who they were; she knew intuitively what it meant. They were the Big Shot, Skinny, and Maloch; the car had been left around the corner for a getaway—and Twisty Morgan's mother lived here somewhere in this block!

It had been only an instant since she had first seen them, and now, before she had scarcely realized what was taking place, they seemed to have melted away into the shadows of the buildings up there and she could not see them any more. But her eyes had never left them, and she had marked the spot where they had disappeared—it was almost opposite the lighted window across the avenue. She knew now where Twisty Morgan's mother lived! She had picked up

the trail of the Big Shot again, whether he was Roy or not, and she would not lose it a second time!

She hurried forward, traversing half the block, and then once more she halted abruptly. From behind one of the pillars of the elevated out in the roadway, and about opposite the house where she had seen the three men vanish, a fourth figure came suddenly into sight. She barely stifled a startled cry. For the second time that night she saw the light glinting on metal buttons. The patrolman on post! And he was making straight for the doorway of the house where she was only too sure now the mother of Twisty Morgan lived!

The policeman paid no attention to her. She did not know whether he had noticed her or not—and, with a little moan, she told herself it did not matter. Nothing mattered! The patrolman had obviously seen the three men enter the house. His suspicions had been aroused, and he was going over there to investigate. The Big Shot, whoever he was, was trapped.

She was only conscious that she was walking forward again because her feet were dragging heavily. The patrolman was at the doorway now. She could just make him out. He seemed to be crouching down. And then suddenly she saw him running back to the other side of the avenue.

And now, herself almost abreast of the Morgan doorway and the lighted store window across the way, she saw the patrolman dart into the store and,

an instant later, through the window, she saw him at a telephone.

The blood began to pound through her veins in ugly thumps. He was telephoning for assistance, of course. There was not a moment to lose. In another minute he would be back again to stand on guard at the door until his hurry call was answered.

One thought, and one thought only, crystallized itself in her mind. She could not risk the chance that the Big Shot might *not* be Roy. If he were Roy it meant prison for him. Prison! Prison for Roy! It was the cry of her heart in crisis, the blood call, overriding, blotting out from her consciousness all question of guilt, all question of her own violation of the moral code. There was only one thing to do, and but a moment in which to do it.

Regardless of whether she herself could be seen by the patrolman or anyone else in the store, she rushed forward to the doorway. The door opened under her hand. She entered, and closed the door behind her. Subconsciously she knew that she was groping her way in frantic haste along a hall of some sort that was unlighted except for a glow which showed from an open doorway at the other end; and in a subconscious way she was aware that a woman's voice from somewhere was cursing and raving in a virulent undertone—she had no more concrete an impression of her surroundings than that.

"Roy!" she cried. "Roy! Roy! Quick! Get out of here quick!"

She saw faces appear suddenly in the lighted doorway—masked faces. Then the light went out. She sensed, rather than heard, a swift rush toward her—and then a pair of hands tightened ferociously around her throat.

"Curse you, close your face," snarled a voice, "or I'll twist that damned windpipe of yours so's you won't never use it again!"

It was Maloch's voice. She tore at his hands, and managed to loosen them a little.

"It's the police!" she choked out. "Oh, don't you understand—they're here!"

Another voice, obviously that of the Big Shot from its authoritative tone, spoke sharply:

"Lay off her, and let's hear what she's got to say! Go on, Sis, what's the dope?"

"The police!" It seemed as though she could not speak fast enough. "The patrolman on post saw you come in here. He followed you to the door. Then he ran across the road into that store opposite here, and I saw him at the 'phone. I'm sure he's outside again now himself, and that there'll be a squad of men here in a few minutes."

The Big Shot's voice snapped crisply out of the darkness:

"See if that's right, one of you! Open the door a crack, and see if there's a bull outside!"

Maloch's hands fell away from her. She heard the man moving quickly toward the door.

"Roy," she faltered, "oh, Roy, I——"

"That's what you said when you came in," he interrupted tersely; "but the Roy stuff doesn't mean anything to us. There's no Roy here. You're in the wrong pew, girlie—but it's lucky for us you are, if what you say is right. Now keep quiet! Listen!"

Maloch's voice came along the hall in a hoarse whisper:

"It's the goods, all right. I got a peek at him. He's holding down the doorstep. Hell, this is tough! And that old bag in there just after coughing up enough so's we know that the stuff's hidden somewhere in the cellar—and us now with no time to make her come through the rest of the way so's we can get it."

"Old bag yourself!" The words came in a screech of fury from the doorway of the room beyond. "No, youse won't get it now! An' I hope to Gawd youse're all pinched. I hope dey burn every one of youse; an' if dey don't, I know who youse are, an' Twisty'll cut de hearts out of youse for dis!"

The Big Shot laughed grimly.

"She's right," he said curtly; "it'll have to stay where it is. That's our hard luck—and hers. If we get out with our skins it'll be all we take away with us—but I guess the cops will wonder enough about what brought us here to have a squint around for themselves. Go on, get close up to the door all of you.

Our only chance is to rush the cop before the rest of them come. But no lead—give him the butt. That'll be enough."

Enid felt her arm grasped. She was being led toward the door. The Big Shot's voice, from beside her, came in an undertone now:

"Come along, Sis, we'll do our best to save you from getting pinched. It would go hard with you if you were caught, no matter what brought you here. Stick close!"

She did not answer. She was trembling. Not through fear—through emotions that were soul deep at the touch of *his* hand upon her arm. It *was* Roy—she felt more sure of it than ever!

For an instant there was utter silence, then the Big Shot's whisper came in a grim monosyllable:

"Now!"

The door was flung suddenly open. A form loomed there. She saw Maloch in the lead raise his arm. There was a hoarse, surprised shout from the patrolman, a spurt of flame from his revolver, and then under Maloch's blow the man went down in a crumpled heap on the doorstep.

She was running, they were all running wildly up the avenue. From somewhere she heard the roar of a fast-travelling car, then a burst of shots.

They were around the corner now. Yes!—as she had surmised, they had left their car parked here. And now they had reached it. She saw Maloch jump

for the wheel—and at the same moment, almost before she knew what had happened, the Big Shot had lifted her from the ground, deposited her on the seat of the tonneau, and had leaped in beside her. The car shot forward. She sank breathlessly back on the cushions.

Skinny, from beside Maloch on the front seat, screamed out suddenly:

"Here they come! Step on it! For God's sake, step on it!"

There was another burst of shots. Something hot seemed to sear across the side of her head. It felt as though she had burned herself with curling tongs. Strange! It made her feel dizzy. She swayed against the Big Shot's shoulder.

"What's the matter?" he asked sharply.

"N-nothing—Roy," she answered weakly.

"Roy! What t'hell do you mean by this Roy stuff again? You hit, Sis?"

But this time she did not answer. Everything was swaying before her eyes. She was dimly conscious that Skinny was leaning out and firing at something, of shots that seemed to sound from everywhere, of the furious speed at which the car was travelling—and then nothingness.

CHAPTER VI

The Girl Bandit

ENID sat up in bed and looked around her. The sunlight was streaming into the room. Mechanically she raised her hand to her head. Her head was bandaged. There was pain there, but it was not very severe. She was conscious of a sense of weakness, but she did not feel ill. Where was she?

She remembered last night. She remembered being wounded and losing consciousness; and she had a hazy recollection of periods of semiconsciousness during which she had been lifted out of the car and carried somewhere, and of some woman who had put her to bed, dressed her head, and given her something to drink. After that she must have slept for hours—for this wasn't early morning sunlight that was flooding the room. It was more likely midday—perhaps later. Yes, she was still wearing her wrist watch—it was nearly three o'clock! And she must have slept restfully, too, for she could think quite clearly now—but this unfamiliar room bothered her. It was a very nice room, tastefully, even richly furnished. It was certainly not a police cell! Therefore

the car must have got away from the police. But what exactly had taken place? Had anyone else been wounded besides herself? Someone, perhaps, *killed?*

At the thought of this possibility she twisted her hands nervously, anxiously together. The Big Shot —Roy—was he safe? The patrolman that Maloch had struck down on the doorstep—what of him? Skinny? Maloch? The officers who had pursued them in the police car? And who lived in this house? Where was she now?

Her glance fell suddenly on a newspaper that lay on the bedside table. For an instant she stared at it, her eyes widening, then she reached out and snatched it up.

"Front-page stuff!" Curiously she seemed to hear Phil Martin saying that again. "Front-page stuff!"

The captions that had caught her eye were set in big type at the head of two columns of text:

JEWEL HIJACKERS ON RAMPAGE

POLICE FOIL ROBBERY
BUT GIRL BANDIT SAVES GANG

Enid read on. The "story" detailed the suspicions of Patrolman Keeney on seeing three men at two o'clock in the morning enter the house where the mother of Twisty Morgan, a notorious underworld character, lived. He had crossed the road to investi-

gate—and had discovered that a felonious entry had been made into the house.

Enid, tight-lipped, nodded her head. She had wondered a little about what had prompted his subsequent actions. He had found that the door had been unlocked, presumably with a skeleton key which naturally had left no traces, but there had been a chain on the inside of the door supplementing the lock, and this had been cut in two by some instrument introduced through the inch or two-inch opening which the chain, when intact, had permitted. Yes, she quite understood that! That was Skinny's work—with the "door tools" that Izzy Myers had told him to take along.

The next paragraph brought a low, startled ejaculation from her lips. The gang's "lookout" had been a girl—that was all that had saved them. The girl bandit had been posted on watch somewhere outside, so the paper said. Patrolman Keeney had seen her dart into the house to give the alarm while he was across the road telephoning to the station house for assistance in order to guard both the front and rear of the premises before attempting an entry into the house.

The girl bandit! *She* was the girl bandit! *She* was one of the gang—a member of the gang. Yes, in the eyes of the law that was quite true. *She,* too, was "wanted"! For a moment she shut her eyes.

The rest of the newspaper account she read frag-

mentarily, almost mechanically. Most of the details she already knew. Patrolman Keeney had been knocked senseless on the doorstep, but had not been seriously hurt. There had been a running fight between the bandits' car and the police car, with no known casualties. The bandits had escaped, due mainly to the fact that a bullet had punctured one of the police-car tires. There was no clue to the bandits' identity. The attempted robbery had been abortive, thanks to the alertness of Patrolman Keeney; but the affair had led to the recovery of all the jewels stolen in the big Maiden Lane break earlier in the evening. It had been a question of gang eat gang—jewel hijackers. The police had returned to Mrs. Morgan's house. Mrs. Morgan had not been communicative. She did not know who it was that had broken into the house, nor what they had come for. She merely raved and swore. The police, however, had other ideas. Twisty Morgan, even if he did not live with his mother, had a record. There must be something there worth having to account for the attempt that had just been made. They had searched the house, found the proceeds of the jewel robbery in the cellar, and were now looking for Twisty Morgan. But up to the time of going to press Twisty Morgan could not be found.

The paper fluttered from her hands to the counterpane. She stared straight in front of her, seeing nothing, striving desperately to think coherently. Who

had placed that newspaper so obviously on the bedside table? And why? Was it to impress her with the fact that she was in the same criminal category as any other member of the gang—that she was hunted too? Who lived in this house? The Big Shot—Roy—must have brought her here. What connection was there between him and the occupants of the house? And—and where was—Roy? Where was *anyone?*

She looked quickly around her now. It was unendurable lying here like this and tormenting herself with unanswerable questions. Yes—there it was! A bell push hung from the head of her bed. A queer little smile crossed her lips as she rang the bell. Wherever she was, the establishment seemed to lack for nothing in the way of comfort and convenience!

Perhaps a minute passed, and then, answering her summons, there was a knock upon the door, and the door opened.

As she stared at the figure standing there, leaning nonchalantly with his back against the door which he had closed behind him, she felt the blood drain from her cheeks. She tried to speak, but there was a choking sensation in her throat and no words would come. She was sure now that it was Roy. Last night she had not seen his face; she had recognized only what she had thought were certain mannerisms in his walk and carriage; but now she was prepared to swear that she recognized his every feature—that it was the same clean-cut, handsome Roy who, until

last night, she had thought was dead. How well he looked, how much the perfect gentleman, as always! Roy—the Big Shot—therefore a criminal. It was incongruous, fanciful! This well-groomed figure a criminal! Her lips trembled. She was snatching at straws again. It was well known to everybody that the successful crooks knew how to wear their clothes! She put her hand to her throat to ease its throbbing. There was no responsive recognition in his face. Those dark-brown eyes of his, the replica of her own, were regarding her merely in a friendly, speculative way.

"We thought we'd let you sleep as long as you could," he said pleasantly. "It was the best tonic you could have. You had a narrow squeak, but I'm glad to say it was only a scalp wound. You'll be around again all right in two or three days. We didn't call a doctor because"—he smiled as he lifted his shoulders—"well, questions might be asked and the police aren't very happy this morning."

She found her voice.

"Oh, never mind about my wound!" she cried, and in a surge of love and yearning reached out her arms to him. "Roy! Roy! Roy! Don't you know me, Roy?"

"I'd like to put 'em around my neck," he said with a grin; "but even a crook, which you know I am, sometimes plays the game. I owe you too much to take the embrace under false pretenses! Whatever the mistake was that brought you into the game last

night I'd have been pinched if it hadn't been for you, and, what with a few other things that they'd have been able to stick onto me, I'd have gone up for keeps. I'm for you, kid, strong, but I don't know who you are. I never saw you in my life until last night."

She stared at him incredulously.

"There wasn't any mistake last night, and there isn't any now," she said. "I followed you intentionally last night. Didn't you hear me call to you from the elevated steps?"

"I heard someone call 'Roy,' " he answered; "but it didn't register with me. No one ever called me Roy before, for the very simple reason that it's not my name."

"What *is* your name, then?" she asked a little numbly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I've had a lot of them," he said. "Varney, for one—Hal Varney. I used that until it got to have too familiar a sound in certain quarters. My real name is—I guess you can be trusted after last night, and since you're in it now yourself—Kane, Norman Kane—usually known as Norry Kane."

"Your name is Roy Howard," she said in a monotone.

"Nix!" he said. "I've told you—Norry Kane."

She bit at her lips, but the tears came. She buried her face in her hands and burst suddenly into sobs.

He came quickly across the room and, sitting on

the edge of the bed, put his arm around her shoulders.

"What's wrong, kid?" he asked anxiously. "I don't get you."

"Oh, why are you acting this way?" she asked piteously. "Is—is it because you are trying to save me from—from the knowledge that my brother is a criminal that you are pretending to be someone else —that you are pretending you do not know me, that you have never seen me before?"

He drew back from her, staring at her in amazement.

"Your brother!" he gasped. "Do you mean to say that you think I am your brother?"

"I don't *think* you are at all"—she had steadied her voice again now—"I know! You are Roy, and I am Enid Howard, your sister."

He was silent for an instant, then he laughed a little grimly.

"Well, either I must look a lot like him," he said, "or you've got something up your sleeve that I don't understand. Anyway, it won't take a minute to knock the brother proposition on the head."

He opened the door and called down the hall. She could not make out exactly what he said, but a moment later he had ushered a man and a woman into the room. She looked swiftly, critically from one to the other. They were middle-aged. The woman was a little overdressed. So was the man. He sported a

massive gold watch chain, and the large diamond screwed into the lower part of his tie was vulgarly blatant.

It was the Big Shot who spoke:

"This young lady says that my name is Roy Howard, and that I am her brother. Will you answer that?"

"What's the matter with her?" inquired the man gruffly. "Is she nutty, or is she getting delirious with that gouge along her head? Maybe we'd better risk a doctor after all, and fake up a reason for the accident."

"That is no answer," said the Big Shot quietly.

"I'll answer her!" said the woman sharply. "I'll say you ain't her brother. An' I guess I ought to know—me that bore you!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Kane, my father and mother—Miss Howard." The Big Shot accompanied the introduction with an indulgent smile and a shrug of his shoulders. Then he motioned the couple from the room and closed the door upon them.

CHAPTER VII

The Big Shot

ENID watched the Big Shot through blurred eyes as he came back toward the bed. She was stunned, but wholly unconvinced. There was something wrong here—something terribly, miserably wrong. It was even worse than that—there was something sinister about the situation. There was no question in her mind but that the Big Shot was Roy. She felt sure they had lied, those two. She had not missed that sudden, ugly gleam in the woman's hard black eyes; nor the crafty glibness of the man's tongue. But quite apart from all that, and no matter what they had said, or how they had acted, or what they had looked like, Roy still remained—Roy. She could not understand. How could Roy, whatever his motive, hope or think to deceive her as to his identity? And yet Roy himself was participating in this unnatural masquerade, and playing his part easily, confidently, as though somehow he actually believed in everything he said and did—and expected her to do likewise!

"Well, that's that!" he said coolly. "And now, I guess I'll fade out of the picture for a bit, and let you

take a turn at the close-ups. Even if you were my sister, which I've proved to you you're not, how did you happen to run into me last night?"

She fought suddenly, desperately for an instant answer that she might not even appear to hesitate. She could not tell him the truth. That would involve Phil Martin.

"I saw you as I went down the elevated steps," she said, and was conscious that, though prompt, her answer was lame.

"Sure! Of course!" he agreed a little curtly. "But what were you doing there alone and at that hour? And what's the idea of that pleasant little habit of yours of carrying a rod around with you in your handbag?"

The question was unexpected.

"Oh, you found that, did you!" she parried mechanically.

"Yeh! And it's still in the handbag over there in the clothes closet with the rest of your things—only it isn't loaded any more." A half smile flickered across his lips. "Safety first, kiddie—but we didn't pinch anything except the cartridges! You couldn't talk yourself, and we thought we might find out something about you—your address, for instance—in the handbag. We didn't find out anything, so let's get back to last night. Go on—you know what I asked you!"

How much could she tell? How much could she

hold back and still make her story ring true? Somehow it seemed ironically unfair that she should be handicapped by being placed on the defensive.

"I've told you my name, and I've told you who I am," she said earnestly. "Why you are acting as you are, I cannot understand; but you *are* Roy, and so you know that we lived in Winnipeg. Father died only a few months ago, and I came to New York to live with our old nurse, Martha. I am writing a book on East Side life, and I am out at all hours, and go everywhere in search of material. I carry that automatic for self-protection."

"Yeh?" He was staring at her with slightly narrowed eyes. "Just luck, then, that you were on the elevated steps, eh? Well, maybe I believe you—and maybe not. And you're still hipped for fair on me being Brother Roy, aren't you? Where does this Martha you're talking about live?"

She gave him the address without any hesitation whatever.

"And you live there with her?" he demanded.

"Yes," she answered.

"Well," he ejaculated with a short laugh, "you seem to have a link-up with about everything that bust loose last night, don't you?"

"What do you mean?" she asked.

He pointed to the paper lying on the bed beside her.

"Maybe you missed it, the headlines not being as

big as *ours,*" he said; "but that little party must have been pulled off pretty near your front door."

She had missed it—she had been incapable of seeing anything in the paper when she had looked at it before except those glaring headlines that had proclaimed her a girl bandit. But now these other headlines that he indicated leaped out at her, bringing her a sudden dread that he would ask still more questions which, for Phil Martin's sake, she dared not answer. Shive Frank! Was he going to ask her if she knew anything about Shive Frank, just because she lived near the corner where the murder had taken place? Automatically she read the headlines again:

WELL-KNOWN GANGSTER SHOT
MURDER CAR ESCAPES
SHIVE FRANK KILLED
ON SECOND AVENUE

She made no comment.

"It was as nice a piece of work, and as prettily done, as anything that's been pulled for a long time," he observed with a complacent and approving grin. "Yeh? You bet! All to the good—and it was coming to him, too! It's too bad, though, if you were looking for stuff for your book, that you didn't stay at home last night. You'd have had a grandstand view of it!"

He had had no ulterior motive, then, in referring

to her home being almost on the spot where Shive Frank had been killed! She knew relief on that score, but now she shuddered at his unseemly attitude toward the crime. He appeared to be brutually jubilant over its accomplishment, and pleased at the cowardly efficiency with which it had been perpetrated. Why? This was Roy in a new and unnatural light. For an instant her heart stood still. Had *he* had anything to do with it? The motive would be there if he knew anything about the connection between Shive Frank and Phil Martin! Was that why he was glad? The question trembling on her lips found voice:

"You—you seem to think his murder was justified. Was—was it you—your gang who killed him?"

He laughed outright in her face.

"Well, you've got a hell of a nerve to ask me that!" he exclaimed. "No, we didn't do it, but I'll tell you this—we had him slated for the spot ourselves, only what's left of the mob he's been travelling with, and that he squealed on, beat us to it." The Big Shot's eyes narrowed, and he was snarling now. "Yeh! You bet! Sure, I'm glad—curse him for the snitch he was! I used to know him pretty well—too well. And lately he's been going around too much with a nosey newspaper guy that we've just found out has been detailed by his lousy sheet to dig out a so-called mysterious Big Shot that's operating in New York. That's *me!* See? There's nothing mysterious about me, except that I know how to keep under cover, but I'm the

one he's after. I don't know what Shive Frank spilled, or how much this newspaper bird knows, but before he gets a chance to start anything we'll show him a few attentions that'll tear the truth out of him; and, if he sounds dangerous, any wreaths that are sent to Shive Frank won't be so faded but that they'll do for him too!"

She raised her hand to the bandage around her head. The motion brought her arm across her eyes, and hid from him the fear and agony that she knew was creeping into them. So he *did* know! And Phil Martin was in danger! It seemed as though cold fingers were clutching at her heart. Into her mind there leaped the remembrance of her happiness and light spirits last night when she had first become sure Phil Martin was just what he had said he was and her doubts of him had been dispelled. And now he was in peril, and there was no longer temporizing with her feelings—she knew she cared for him dearly, cared for him with all her heart and soul. But she knew, too, in this same moment, that her love could never know fulfilment now—even if he, too, cared. Blinding, poignant agony of mind was upon her. It was not only that the man here who threatened Phil was her own brother Roy, but that she was the *sister* of a criminal.

The Big Shot was pacing up and down the room now, his fists clenched, muttering savagely under his breath. She lowered her arms and stole a glance at

him. His face was hard and set, and there was something even tigerish in his expression—it was as though some strange metamorphosis had come over the man from the instant that his passions had been aroused. She did not falter in her belief that he was Roy, but this was not characteristic of the brother she had known. She had never known him to indulge in mad outbursts of passion, or to be mercilessly vindictive—but neither had she ever known before that he had violent criminal tendencies!

She could have cried out in her torment of mind. There was something wrong, something terribly wrong here! How was it possible, even if Roy were the most superb actor who had ever lived, that he had never once permitted the slightest flicker of recognition to escape him? The Big Shot—her brother! Phil! She loved them both—though grief and dismay at what he had become entered, as they must enter, into her feelings for Roy. What was she to do? What could she do? How much, for Phil's sake, could she find out without arousing suspicion? In what way could she best handle Roy? By meeting him more or less on his own ground? Well, she would try that, anyhow.

"And how and when do you propose to do all this?" she inquired a little mockingly.

He turned on her angrily.

"Soon enough!" he snapped. "Sooner than he'll like! What's that got to do with you?"

"I was thinking that it had a great deal to do with you," she retorted. "That you had about enough already to take up your time after last night. According to the papers, that woman told the police she didn't know who had broken into her house; but that isn't what she said when we were there. She said she knew who you were, and that Twisty would cut the heart out of you for it. The paper gives a very good account of who Twisty is, and if he knows who, to use the newspaper phrase, was hijacking him, that means you've got a red-hot gang war on your hands. That's what you've got to look out for first, isn't it? That's where your greatest danger lies—right here in this house, perhaps—in retaliation."

He stopped short in his walk.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" he jerked out savagely. "Thinking of your own skin, eh—that you might get caught in a jam here!"

She used the only weapon she had.

"I did not think of my own skin last night, did I?" she inquired coldly.

For an instant he stood rocking on his feet, glaring at her—and then suddenly all the savagery was gone from him.

"No, I'll say you didn't, Sis!" he said contritely. "Say, don't hold what I said against me." He sat down on the edge of the bed and took her hand. "Listen, kid, I'll tell you. I get like that sometimes when I've got it in for somebody. What's a fellow to

do—sit still and suck his thumbs and let some guy butt in and put him away up the river to get burnt? What you say about Twisty Morgan's got a lot of truth in it. I don't think Twisty's mother knew me, and I'm dead sure Twisty doesn't know anything about this house; but I guess the old woman 'made' either Skinny or Maloch and perhaps both of them. Sure, hell's going to break loose—I know that. Twisty's had to duck for cover, but he's got a big gang, and he'll play his hand for all it's worth from offstage. But you leave that to me. And you leave that newspaper gink to me, too. I'll take care of him, all right—he won't write any report about how I looked under the big light sitting on the hot seat up there at Sing Sing! You just forget it! And don't ask any more questions, either, because what you don't know won't hurt you, and they won't be answered, anyway. Now, get that, kid? I mean it!" His eyes had narrowed a little again. "Understand?"

She was heartsick—beaten for the moment. She understood only too well. Her efforts had gained her nothing. He was in deadly earnest. He obviously had not the slightest suspicion that, let alone being acquainted with him, she knew anything about this "newspaper gink," and to ask further questions now after what he had said would only lead to disaster. There was but one thing left to do—somehow, in some way, and at the same time without betraying Roy, she must send a warning to Phil Martin. How?

She did not know. Under the circumstances it would appear to be attempting almost the impossible. But there *must* and there would be a way. She would find one—make one. There was no other alternative.

She forced a quiet smile.

"All right," she said. "But you—are there any more questions *you* want to ask about me and last night?"

He lighted a cigarette and stared for an instant at the blue spiral curling upward from its tip.

"No," he said. "I guess your story's straight, and I guess you believe you thought I was your brother. As soon as you're able to go out I'll take you over to your place and give that book you say you're writing the once-over as a sort of check-up, and then call it a case of mistaken identity and let it go at that."

Mistaken identity! He had said that, too, as though he meant it—and believed it. She looked at him for a long minute steadily. He wasn't, he couldn't be playing a studied part; he was too spontaneous and natural in all he said and did for that—and yet he was Roy. What did it mean? What could it mean?

"Roy," she said in a low, strained voice, "don't you honestly and truly know me? I am sure I haven't changed so much as all that, but that couldn't be the reason, anyway, for you say your name is not Roy and that you never heard it before."

"Aw, say, snap out of it!" he exclaimed with a

tolerant grin. "I've told you straight you've got the wrong number. What's the use of going to the mat with the thing again?"

"Because," she answered quickly, "if you really believe what you say, then there is something terribly strange about it all. You are Roy, and my brother. I am certain of it. If for some incredible reason you do not recognize me, then at least you know you had a sister and that you lived in Winnipeg."

"I never had a sister, and I never lived in Winnipeg," he said.

"Where *did* you live, then?"

"In Chicago. I was born there"—he laughed shortly—"on the South Side. My mother and father were crooks—they still are. You've seen 'em. I've been a crook all my life. We've come up in the world a bit—from the slums. I've been a dutiful son, and they're getting the benefit of all the bank roll—see? But we're all crooks just the same as we ever were. Everybody in this house is a crook, even to Runty, who's cook, footman, and everything else, because he fractured his arm about a year ago and couldn't make a decent living any more at picking pockets."

"You weren't born in Chicago," she asserted stubbornly. "You were born in Winnipeg, and you lived there all your life until you went to the war. You *did* go to the war, didn't you?"

"Oh, yes, I guess I must have gone to the war, all right," he answered, "because I woke up in a German hospital—but that's all I know about it."

"What do you mean by 'you guess you must have gone'?" she asked quickly. "Don't you know when you went, and how, and where, and—oh, a thousand details about it all?"

He grinned at her as he lighted a cigarette.

"Nix!" he said. "I didn't know anything when I got through. I didn't even know my own name."

She stared at him wide-eyed.

"You had your identification disk."

His grin broadened.

"According to what they told me, the show I was in didn't leave me with even that much wearing apparel."

"Well, then, when did you begin to remember who you were?"

"I didn't." He shrugged his shoulders.

She leaned suddenly toward him. She was beginning to see, beginning to understand now why Roy had never written home. But that he should have become a criminal! Her heart was beating wildly.

"How do you know, then, that you came from Chicago? and how do you know now who you are?"

"Aw, say—listen!" he ejaculated a little pityingly. "I get you, but there's nothing to it. I'll say I'm dumb all right on this memory stuff about everything that happened before I got done in, but that doesn't help

you out any. You're way off. I've told you before. You've got the wrong dope."

There was a sudden quiet in her voice.

"Tell me about it—all—everything!" she said.

He dragged ruminatively on his cigarette for a moment, then again he shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, well, sure, if you're so stuck on it!" he grunted. "It won't take long. The Fritzies told me I'd been blown up in an ammunition dump with some other Americans when the Allies were running like mad in that spring retreat of 'eighteen. I was the only one they found who wasn't a corpse, and they made me a prisoner and shoved me in a hospital. After the war they handed me back to the Americans, and I was brought over to New York. I couldn't remember my name or anything, and there was a lot of hot air about making me a hospital case and putting me under observation and all that sort of stuff, but I was as physically fit as ever I'd been in my life, and I did the duck good and plenty on that little idea. I handed myself a name—Hal Varney—and then started out looking for a job."

He paused, flicked the ash with sudden savageness from his cigarette, and gave a bitter laugh.

"I didn't get one! We weren't such God Almighty heroes after the war as my buddies had told me we were when we were going over! The streets weren't lined with a throat-busting, Old Glory-yelling populace handing out ice-cream cones—or jobs—to ex-

soldiers! I didn't get one. I didn't get anything except a few hours' work here and there. I went flat. There was a joint down off the Bowery where they sold bad liquor to bums when the bums had any money, and sometimes if you were a regular customer they'd hand you a shot for nothing—and there was always some come-on soup twice a day. It was a hell of a hole—and I was one of the bums." He paused again. "D'you like it so far?"

There were tears in her eyes; she could only see him mistily.

"Go on!" she whispered.

"Aw, don't let it get your goat, kid!" he chuckled. "It turned out all right for me. I'd never have known who I was, or made the killing I have to-day, if it hadn't been for that dump. It was owned by a fellow named Izzy Myers, who owned a lot of other queer places, too. It wasn't often he showed himself around there, but one night, the first time I'd ever seen him, he blew in. He spotted me, and came over and called me by my right name. 'Hello, Norry!' he said. 'The last time I was out in Chicago your ma and dad told me you'd been killed in France. Say, this'll be some news for them.' I wasn't so well by this time; in fact, what with lack of nourishment, I was damned sick. Izzy took me to his house and I came down with pneumonia. He sent for my father and mother. He'd been an old Chicago crook himself, and he'd known my people and me since I was a kid in the gutters.

Well, that's about all. I got the dope on everything. I had a nice little record myself in Chicago with a gang. That's why I had enlisted—to duck my nut because things were getting too hot. A lot of us, I guess, did that. Some of the big New York fellows did. Anyway, when I got better I joined Izzy's crowd, and so did my father and mother. That's ten or eleven years ago now and we're still working together—only I'm the Big Shot now, and Izzy takes his orders from me, and Ma and Pa are living swell."

She sat tense and motionless there in the bed. Izzy Myers! She saw his scoundrelly figure sitting at that desk in the junk shop. She saw it all—the years of it, the abhorrent, bitter cruelty of it. She was certain now beyond any doubt that he was Roy. Amnesia! This was how he had become a criminal—blamelessly! Roy's loss of memory exploited to wreck his life, to rob him of his fine, clean manhood, to enslave him in the filth and mire of a criminal career! Izzy Myers! This house of crooks!

"Roy, come closer to me," she said in a broken way—and then, as he obeyed her, she reached out her hands, and clasping his face between them, made him look into her eyes. "Roy, I know now that you believe all you have told me, but not one word of it is true. It is all false. It is all a piece of vile trickery of which you have been the victim. Roy, you never went over to France with the Americans; I can show you a photograph of yourself in Canadian uniform."

He smiled once more that pitying smile at her.

"The Fritzies ought to know," he said. "And where were the Canadians and Americans together on the same front?"

"I don't know," she answered. "But I can show you the picture."

"Sure!" he said. "I guess you've got a picture all right; and I guess it must look enough like me so's it would make a swell alibi if I wanted to use it—but it isn't me."

"It is you!" she insisted desperately. "You were reported 'missing.' I—I thought you were dead until I saw you last night. You are Roy Howard—my brother. And—and it's so easily proved. I could bring scores of people from Winnipeg who know you. And there's Martha, our old nurse, living right here in New York, though she's away just now for a little while. Don't you think she ought to know you? Don't—don't you see how easy it will be to show you that I am right?"

He took her two hands from his face and laid them as though by way of finality on her lap.

"Hell, kid," he said, "I've had a dozen guys from Chicago, that I used to pal with there before the war, come up to me here on the street in New York and do the identity stunt you're talking about." He got up from the edge of the bed where he had been sitting and walked toward the door. "Forget it! Wipe it off the slate! You couldn't have been more than

a kid of twelve or thirteen anyhow when you last saw your brother. It's a sure-fire case of mistaken identity. I've told you so before. Let it go at that!"

The tears were welling back into her eyes. She held out her arms toward him imploringly.

"Oh, Roy, listen to me!" she pleaded wildly. "Listen to me! I was old enough to remember. Do you think I could ever forget you? You are Roy Howard, and that man and woman here are no more your father and mother than I am. That man Izzy Myers lied to you. They've all lied to you. Don't you see? Oh, don't you see? They've exploited you. Izzy Myers turned you into a criminal for his own ends by making you believe you'd always been one. They've done the cruelest, vilest, blackest thing to you that was ever done to a human being!"

He came suddenly halfway back across the room, ignoring her arms, his jaws outthrust a little.

"Say, cut that out!" he advised gruffly. "And use a little common sense. What would Izzy Myers expect to get out of me ten years ago by turning me into a crook? A hell of a fat lot—*not!* I was just a bum—a down-and-outer."

"I don't know," she said. "But I know it's true. And what I've told you about that man and woman is true, too."

He stood for an instant surveying her with screwed-up eyes.

"Well, if you want to keep on thinking so—go to

it!" he flung out. "But don't pull anything like that on them, or they'll raise hell with you—and I'm not always at home! I've told you they aren't nice people and that this is a house of crooks. Understand? You're a good kid, and I guess you're straight, and I certainly owe you something for last night, so I'm telling you this for your own good. If you don't go around asking for trouble you'll be well treated here, and you can have the run of the house until you're well enough to go away; but if you start anything—I'm telling you!—look out for yourself." He stepped back to the door, and opened it. "See you later!" he said, and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER VIII

When It Got Dark

A LUXURIOUSLY furnished room with its private bath —in a house of crooks! Enid smiled wanly to herself as she rose from the bed and, in the darkness, hastily and silently began to don her clothes. The room seemed somehow curiously to epitomize the long afternoon hours of mental turmoil and torment through which she had just passed; it seemed to stand for so much, to point so far, to typify the times—in these modern days outlawry and banditry were well and comfortably, even impregnably, perhaps, entrenched in New York! But in an intimate, personal way this room went far beyond all that—it frightened her. It frightened her because it was the material evidence of Roy's illicit prosperity, because it was something of which he was *proud*, something that he ranked as an achievement, something that he looked upon as success—something that in her heart and soul she knew he would not readily forgo.

She had tried to face the problem squarely, to view it from all angles; but she had not been able to see the end. Roy was as certain and assured that he was

not Roy as she was certain that he was. A strange and bitter impasse! This cowardly thing that they had done to him, this cruel, irreparable wrong! She did not know whether by medical aid there would be any way of restoring his memory to him—and even if there were, would he not jeer at the very suggestion of submitting to treatment?

She could not see into the future, her travail of mind through the hours had been of no avail in that respect; but the hours had not been wholly fruitless. She had seen the road just a little way ahead. There was the immediate present, and her decision in regard to that stood forth clearly defined. Whatever the ultimate outcome might be, and whether Roy might ever regain his mental health or not, she would strive her utmost to wean him from his life of crime, and meanwhile to the best of her ability prevent and stand between him and the commission of any projected felonious act.

Her face was very grave and troubled now as she hurried on with her dressing. Yes, she knew well enough what she was attempting—perhaps it was the impossible. The only way she could hope to prevent a crime was to have pre-knowledge of the fact that it was to be committed; and the only way she could obtain that pre-knowledge was by keeping in contact with, and winning the confidence of, Roy and those around him—yes, even to that pseudo Mr. and Mrs. Kane, for instance! Duplicity! She must become

a past-mistress in the art of duplicity if she were to have any hope of success whatever.

Well, she had made a beginning! She was practising that art now. They all thought that her wound was serious enough to keep her confined to her bed. They all thought that, early as it was—not much after nine o'clock—she had settled down for the night, for when Roy had put his head inside the door a little while ago to ask how she was and to say that he was going out, she had told him she was feeling more comfortable and believed she could sleep through the night if she were left undisturbed!

But she, too, was going out! All through that afternoon, mingling with her thoughts of Roy, had been her thoughts of Phil Martin—those two who meant most to her in all the world, yet who, adding to her fear and anxiety, were seeking, from such different motives, each other's destruction. That warning which she had told herself must reach Phil had scarcely been out of her mind. That was where she was going now—to warn Phil.

At the time she had not known how, or seen any way by which this could be done—she had known only that somehow and at all costs she must get word to him. But she believed now that it was not to prove so difficult after all, and that it could even be accomplished with almost perfect safety.

She had realized that she could neither trust nor bribe anyone in the house to help her, that she must

depend wholly upon herself, and that to lie there in bed was to accept defeat from the outset. And so, when Roy had left the room that afternoon, she had got out of bed.

She had been a little dizzy, and somewhat unsteady on her feet at first, but she had been relieved to find that she was not nearly so weak as she had expected. She had walked to the window—and found her problem solved for her. Somehow, though she could not have told why, she had imagined her room was on an upper story, whereas it was on the ground floor and only a few feet from the ground itself; also, it was at the rear and opened on a back yard which was inclosed with a high fence. But there was a gate in the fence, and the gate had even been partially open, giving her a glimpse of a lane beyond. It was the way out, she had told herself, when it got dark.

The rest of the afternoon she had divided between intervals in bed and intervals of walking, barefooted, silently, up and down and around the room to accustom herself to the exercise. No one had come near her except Runty, the little man with the crooked arm, who looked more like a benign old clergyman than a one-time pickpocket ace; he had brought her an excellently cooked meal. The Kanes, whether through instructions from Roy or not, had left her to her own devices.

And now the way was clear. Runty had removed

the tray, and Roy had gone out—and she, presumably, had settled down for the night. She was quite sure after what she had said to Roy that no one would come to the room while she was away. It was quite safe—she was confident of that. She had only to slip out of the window and return by the same way when she had accomplished her purpose. She meant to telephone the newspaper office in the hope that Phil might be there, or that they would tell her where he was. Failing that she would look for him at the Gondola; or, failing that again, she would leave a note for him with Joe Caprillo, and at the same time, to make assurance doubly sure, she would send a duplicate of the note to the newspaper office.

She could not, of course, tell Phil how or by what means she had come by the knowledge that he was in danger; but, whether she spoke to him personally or reached him by means of a note, she could make it plain and unmistakable to him that he must be on his guard, and make him realize that, while he did not know the Big Shot, the Big Shot knew him and all about his association with Shive Frank.

She began to put on her hat. It would, with a little delicate coaxing, just slip over the bandage, and, when on, would hide the bandage nicely, she knew, for she had experimented with it during the afternoon; but it was a little more difficult now in the darkness. The bandage must not be disturbed, and——

From somewhere she heard the faint ringing of a bell—the door bell, she supposed. Mechanically she adjusted her hat as she listened. Yes, it had been the door bell, for she could hear someone going to the front door now. Did it make any difference? It couldn't be Roy, for he would surely have had a key, and there was certainly no one else who could affect her plans.

Yet still she listened. The front door opened and closed, and suddenly she found herself standing tense and rigid as a man's voice harsh and loud with excitement reached her.

"Where's the Big Shot?" he demanded. "Maloch's killed, curse 'em; but"—with a coarse laugh—"we got Martin, that sneaking newspaper fool, all right, and that's——"

"Hold your tongue!" a woman's voice interrupted sharply. "That damned girl's back in there, and"—her voice broke into a savage sneer—"the sweet thing's not to be disturbed! Norry's out. So's everybody else but me. Come into the front room here and tell your story—and I want to talk to *you,* too."

A door closed softly. Enid could hear no more. There had been something familiar about the man's voice, though she could not place it; the woman, of course, was Mrs. Kane. Her hands clenched tightly at her sides. What did it matter who they were! Her face, she knew, was white with fear and anxiety. What had he meant by saying they had "*got*" Phil?

Her clenched hands opened—she wrung them together. Not dead! He couldn't mean that! They—they hadn't killed Phil! Oh, not that—not that! But—but something! And before she had been able to warn him They had struck too quickly for her. The tears sprang into her eyes. She dashed them away. What had the man meant? What had they done to Phil? She must know—no matter what the risk, she must know!

She opened the door of her room silently, inch by inch; and then stepped out cautiously into what proved to be a dimly lighted and thickly carpeted hall. She had never, of course, been out of her room before and the surroundings were strange to her, but a glance showed her that on the side of the hall opposite her room there were two doors—the one nearer the front of the house being closed, while the other, wide open, disclosed an unlighted room. And now she caught the sound of voices again. The sound seemed to come from the farther room, and yet at the same time seemed to reach her through that open door. Yes, of course! She could see now a faint glow of light in the nearer room that was filtering in from somewhere other than the hall. Connecting rooms!

Her footsteps made no sound on the heavy carpet as she moved swiftly forward. She stepped over the threshold of the open doorway, and the next instant she was far enough within the room to see that it was separated only from the front room by a pair of

drawn portières. And now, standing well back, herself secure from observation, she could not only hear distinctly but, where the hangings fell a little apart, could see into the room beyond.

Izzy Myers! That was why the man's voice had sounded familiar. He had flung himself into a chair and was twisting a cigar around in his mouth. He looked flushed, excited, and ugly. She could not see Mrs. Kane so well, for the woman was still standing and was a little out of the line of vision; but she caught a glimpse of angry black eyes and a clenched hand.

It was Mrs. Kane who was talking, and there was no mistaking the passion in the woman's voice:

". . . . No, of course he don't believe her, but he don't think she's nutty or anything like that. He thinks she's straight and that she believes what she says, and that he looks like her brother; but, being only a kid when she saw him last, he thinks her mistake is natural enough."

"Sure!" grunted Izzy Myers. "Well, that's all there is to it, ain't it?"

"No; it isn't!" said Mrs. Kane savagely. "It won't *end* there! She's dangerous! I'm afraid of her—and I'm afraid of her because I *know* she's straight. She's going to cling to Norry like a leech on that brother stuff, and what's going to happen, with Norry letting her hang around him if our honest little Sunday-school miss gets to know too much? I'm asking you,

what's going to happen then—to you and me and all the rest of us? I'll tell you! Sing Sing! And the little red house up there for some of us, at that! She's going to split because her baby conscience wouldn't let her do anything else! Does that register?"

Izzy Myers scowled.

"Aw, say," he said, "she's in bad with the police herself now, 'count of last night."

"Yes," jeered Mrs. Kane, "and do you think that makes us safe? It's possibly true for now—I dare say it is—but it wouldn't count if she found out *some* things!"

Izzy Myers's scowl deepened.

"No; I'll say it wouldn't!" he agreed with an oath. "Well, what's the answer?"

"Get rid of her!" snapped Mrs. Kane.

"You mean a ride?"

"What do you think I mean? There's only one *sure* way—and that's the easiest way, isn't it? Are you getting squeamish?"

"I ain't never yet. Why don't you go ahead and do it, then? You've got her handy enough here, ain't you?"

"I can't do it while she's in this house, you fool!" retorted Mrs. Kane. "If Norry got wise it would be good-night. Norry's going to let her go home in another day or so, and in that time she can't do any more harm here than she's done already; but once she leaves this house the less time that's lost the bet-

ter. I guess it's up to you, isn't it? And I guess you don't need to be told how to put it across, either, do you, so that Norry won't get next?"

Enid shivered as she passed her hand across her eyes. Was this real? Had anything been real since last night when she had left Phil Martin at the Gondola? Izzy Myers, by the expression on his face, was debating in his mind the advisability of her *murder* with as few qualms as though he were considering the extinction of a house fly!

"I get you!" said Izzy Myers, delivering his verdict with an unpleasant smile. "You've pulled the right dope. Safety first! We can't take any chances with her. Sure! All right! Leave it to me. I don't know what kind of an accident it'll be, but I'll fix it so's Norry'll never tumble. That good enough?"

"Yes!" Mrs. Kane's sigh was one of vicious and unhallowed relief.

"Well, forget her then until you read about it in the papers," said Izzy Myers casually; "and if it ain't never in the papers I'll tell you what happened. Where'd you say the Big Shot was?"

"I didn't say," Mrs. Kane replied. "I said he was out. I don't know where."

"That ain't so good!" Izzy Myers rumpled his forehead as he chewed in sudden anxiety on his cigar. "I'll have to find him. I told you, didn't I, that Maloch's got the spot, and that we've got that newspaper bird!"

"Yes, but you didn't tell me anything else about it. Who bumped Maloch off?"

Izzy Myers burst into a torrent of fervent blasphemy.

"Who d'you think after last night! Twisty Morgan's crowd, of course! They plugged him in the back room of French Charlie's about half an hour ago."

Mrs. Kane drew in her breath sharply.

"I don't like that!" she said. "That means trouble."

"You've said a mouthful!" he snarled. "There's going to be a lot of glass wagons gumming up the traffic for this, blast 'em to the pit!"

"And who's going to be riding in them?" inquired Mrs. Kane acidly.

"Twisty is—as soon as we can nose him out. And while we're waiting for that we'll take care of the others. Riding in them? They will!"

"Or us," amended Mrs. Kane caustically. "We started it last night."

Izzy Myers's eyes narrowed in ugly fashion.

"No, we didn't—but we'll *finish* it!" he asserted fiercely. "You know damned well it's six months old, over that coke deal when Twisty double-crossed us. As Maloch said last night, Twisty'd ought to have been bumped off long ago."

"Yes," observed Mrs. Kane significantly; "and to-night it's Maloch that's dead! I don't like it, I

tell you! This will only end up in us or them getting wiped out."

"Yeh!" growled Izzy Myers. "That's what I said! That's what we're going to do to 'em—wipe 'em out!"

Mrs. Kane stamped her foot.

"You're fools!" she flung out furiously. "All of you! This gang-war stuff is mad! You can't any of you see an inch ahead of your noses. Why don't you attend to your own business instead of getting down on your bended knees and asking the police to butt in and hand you one over the bean? You're fools! You hear me? Every damned one of you! *I'll* talk to Norry about this! And what about this newspaper man? Butting in there, too, are you? Asking for more trouble! My God—the newspapers! What about this fellow Martin?"

"Yes!" said Enid to herself tensely—and held her clenched hands tight against her cheeks. "Yes! Yes! Phil! What have you done to Phil?" It was the one question she wanted to ask—the one answer she wanted to hear—the one reason why she was standing here. What did Twisty Morgan matter—or a gang feud?

"Say, what's biting you to-night?" There was a sullen note creeping into Izzy Myers's voice. "You give me a pain! We didn't do any butting in! He's the bird that did that. See? He's looking for a pat on the back from his paper, and maybe a few extra

dollars, and everybody telling him how smart he is because he was able to get the goods on the Big Shot of New York that nobody else couldn't do. Get me? He's trying to nominate Norry for the juice jolt up the river, and hoping he'll clean up enough of the rest of us at the same time so's the P. K. will have to put twin beds in the cells to accommodate the crowd! Butting in! I ask you! Well, he won't butt in any more!"

"Where is he? What have you done to him?" demanded Mrs. Kane.

"He's tied up and chewing on a gag down in the 'bird cage' on Eighty-third Street, and Batty Rose is keeping lone house and looking after him."

"You surely don't mean that same old place near Avenue A?" Mrs. Kane's voice rose accusingly, challengingly.

"Yes, that's what I do mean—and don't fly off the handle again if you can help it!" Izzy Myers laughed shortly. "What you need to-night is a dose of soothing syrup! I know all about not being able to get by with a 'To Let' sign forever, and that we'd decided our time was up there, and that we'd make a shift at once; but it ain't so easy to find the right place, and it ain't so easy to fix up the deal, either. We ain't——"

Enid heard no more. Swiftly, silently, she gained the hall, entered her own room, and closed the door. He was alive! Phil was alive! And she knew where

he was. He was alive—alive—alive—but there was no time to lose!

Her handbag—the unloaded automatic! She would need that, and it would not always be unloaded. She crossed the room in the darkness, secured the handbag, and, going then to the window, began to raise it cautiously. A house "To Let" on Eighty-third Street near Avenue A. Pray God there was not more than one vacant house in that vicinity!

The window was up now. She swung herself quickly over the sill to the ground, and the next instant was running across the yard toward the gate that opened on the lane.

CHAPTER IX

Alias Someone Else

WITH her latchkey Enid let herself into Martha Debbins's house and, running along the hall, entered the small living and work room that connected with her bedroom. She turned on the light and pulled open the drawer of her desk where she kept the reserve supply of ammunition for her automatic.

Her eyes, as she began to load the weapon, roved about the room. The typewriter, the pile of manuscript, the odds and ends, the telephone on the desk that she had had installed when she had come to live here, the photographs of her father and mother on the mantelpiece were all just as she had left them. These were her belongings, this was her home—and yet it seemed incredible that she had ever lived here and been peacefully engaged in an effort to write a book!

Her book! Would it ever be written now? She did not know. It was not likely, and in the light of other things it was now of very little consequence. It was as though her entire life had been transformed, as though she were no longer *herself,* but someone else

through whose eyes she was witnessing, and through whose body she was participating in, a chaos of crime and ruthless violence—and only danger, and anxiety, and an unreality that was filled with horror seethed around her.

Her fingers worked mechanically at the loading of the pistol. The telephone caught her eye again. It offered mute assistance—there was a world of people at the other end. Yes—but not one, no one to whom she dared appeal. Certainly not the police! If she telephoned the police they would go to the house with the "To Let" sign and liberate Phil undoubtedly—but they would quite as certainly be waiting there when Izzy Myers returned with the Big Shot, with *Roy*. The newspaper office was just as bad. She had even thought of Joe Caprillo, but she could not picture the grimy, ingratiating little proprietor of the Gondola running himself voluntarily into any physical danger; and, besides, she did not trust him. The trails all led to Roy—and while she could do so, and at the same time save Phil Martin, she must do her utmost to protect Roy.

No; no telephone! Why had it even intruded itself? She shook her head. She had thought it all out on her way uptown from Roy's house on Fifty-first Street. She must depend on herself and on herself alone just as long as she could. Morally Roy did not deserve prison. Her conscience and her love were on common ground there. She had saved him from it

last night—and she would save him from it always so far as she was able.

The automatic was loaded now. She laid it down on the desk and, hurrying from the room, began to mount the stairs to the second story. The reloading of her pistol had been one of the two reasons for her return here to her rooms; the other one had come to her as an inspiration—at least she hoped it would prove to be an inspiration—on her way uptown. Time, of course, was a vital factor, but she felt that she had a fairly safe margin to work on, and that in the very nature of things this visit would not delay her very much. She did not know the number of Roy's house; but, having carefully located the lane so that she could return by the same way she had come, she knew that his house fronted on Fifty-first Street, therefore her rooms here had been, as it were, almost directly on her way from Roy's to that house somewhere on Eighty-third Street near Avenue A, and her coming here could cost her but very little extra time. But in any case, though she would lose not a moment more than she could help, it had been imperative that she come here in order to carry out the plan she had formulated, a plan which seemed to her now so necessary, not only in the present instance, but for the future, if she was to preserve contact with Roy.

She reached the head of the stairs and entered Martha Debbins's bedroom. Her lips were suddenly

tight. Her plan! Yes, it frightened her just a little. But, she told herself reassuringly as she turned on the light, it wasn't nearly as desperate an adventure as it appeared to be on the surface. She had only one man, a man named Batty Rose, to contend with—no one else. That was what Izzy Myers had said—that Batty Rose was alone in the "bird cage" with Phil Martin. She had only this Batty Rose to outwit.

She was working with cool, quick precision now. This was her inspiration. Martha was a middle-aged woman and painfully old-fashioned in her dress. From the clothes closet Enid procured a somewhat shabby dress of dark material; the bureau drawers furnished a pair of black cotton stockings and a discarded pair of spectacles; a little search discovered a pair of worn, low-heeled shoes; and the shelf of the closet disclosed an unstylish and frayed old hat with a wide brim.

She made the change rapidly, and surveyed herself in the mirror. It was far from being perfect as a disguise, but the result was even better than she had hoped for. The skirt reached almost to her ankles, the hat brim flopped over her eyes, and her whole appearance was draggled. She looked a frump. The description that Batty Rose, who had never seen her before, would be able to give would certainly never connect her in the Big Shot's mind with Enid How-

ard, the girl who was supposed to be ill in bed in the house on Fifty-first Street!

Yes, it was all right so far as the purpose of this makeshift disguise concerned Batty Rose; but in order to reach Batty Rose she would be obliged to come into contact with the outside world, and she must do so without attracting undue attention to herself, let alone inviting the slightest suspicion. And now the mirror told her that there was something noticeably incongruous about her appearance in this attempt of hers to pass for a middle-aged, inoffensive little woman of the poorer class. Her clothes carried out the idea perfectly, and, thanks to the hat, no one would have been able to tell whether her hair was gray, brown, or yellow; but, in spite of the added assistance furnished by the spectacles, she looked too *young!*

This gave her a moment of anxiety, and then a queer little smile of relief crossed her lips. She must make herself look more like a hard-working woman and one who perhaps, either through habit or the hurry of her life to make both ends meet, did not pay too strict attention to her personal cleanliness. Downstairs in the kitchen there were cold ashes in the stove. A little grime, though she must be careful not to overdo it, would remove the freshness from her face—yes, and disguise those well-kept hands of hers as well.

Well, she was ready now except for that further

metamorphosis, and that long coat of Martha's hanging in the lower hall which had an inside pocket where she could carry her automatic and so dispense with her handbag—which latter would have been both obtrusive and awkward.

She turned out the light and ran down the stairs. In the kitchen, with the aid of a hand glass which she took from her bedroom, she put on her improvised make-up as artistically as she could. She nodded her head in satisfaction. It quite answered the purpose, she no longer looked so startlingly young. She even tried to smile a little at herself. She certainly did not look at all like Enid Howard!

But the minutes were flying! She had not been long in the house, not nearly so long as it had seemed, she was sure, but, long or short as her stay had been, she certainly had not a single minute to waste. She returned the hand glass to her bedroom, picked up her loaded automatic from the desk, took her purse from her handbag, extinguished all the lights, flung herself into Martha's old coat, and, locking the front door behind her, stepped out onto the street.

Which was the quickest way? There was only a surface line on First Avenue and none at all on Avenue A. She could of course take the Second Avenue elevated at Sixty-fifth Street and get off at Eightieth, as she had done last night; but, in addition to the time it would take her to reach the elevated station from here, it would leave her with five blocks to walk

when she got to Eightieth Street. Well, then, a taxi? Her appearance was certainly not that of one accustomed to spend money on such a luxury as a taxi, and she would have preferred to avoid the use of one now; but at this hour, in the light traffic, it would undoubtedly make good time—and, after all, what did it matter if the driver's curiosity were aroused and he might later remember that he had set an unusual sort of fare down at, say, Avenue A and Eighty-second Street? She certainly would not have him take her any nearer her real destination than that!

She had reached the corner of Second Avenue now, and after but a moment's wait was able to hail a passing taxi. She gave the chauffeur the address she had decided upon, and, with the added injunction to hurry, entered the car.

She settled herself for the ride as patiently as she could. How much time did she really have? Was it a question of hours to spare, or merely minutes? How wide was that margin of safety? She had told herself all along that it was ample and she still believed so—Izzy Myers had not been in so great haste but that he had been willing to sit down and talk to Mrs. Kane, and even after he had once left Fifty-first Street it would be necessary to search for Roy without anything definite to go on, except to make the round of what he would consider the likely places. It would, in the ordinary run of things, take him a

long time to find Roy, hours probably; and yet—sitting here inactive, doubts and fears began to assume uncomfortable proportions—if by chance he had run into Roy almost at the start the race between Izzy Myers and herself would be a close one. No! She shook her head resolutely. She would not let herself be driven into a panic. There was still another little margin of safety. There was no imperative need for Roy to go to the "bird cage" the instant Izzy Myers got in touch with him—any time during the night would do. Roy was not likely to make a rush for the place. And, besides, the news that Maloch had been shot by Twisty Morgan's gang would almost certainly claim the Big Shot's first consideration and would materially affect his movements.

But, nevertheless, fast as the taxi was travelling, she wished it would go faster.

Her thoughts swung into another channel, but one that was even more torturous and less conducive to her peace of mind. If it were not that the man she loved was in very real danger of perhaps even his life, what she was doing now would have seemed quixotic, chimerical, and foolhardy—but it was the only way out that she saw for both Phil and Roy. But afterward? Even if she were successful to-night, what about the afterward? What about her future relationship with Phil? She was the *sister* of a criminal. Yes, it was back again, that thought with all its poignant suffering! True, from the moment she had

realized what she believed was the scurrilous trickery that had started Roy on his career of crime, she had not considered him morally guilty—but the law would not look on it in the same way, nor would the world. She could not make a social outcast of Phil Martin. She could never do anything to harm his career or embitter his future. And so there could never be anything between him and herself.

Her eyes were suddenly blurred and wet as she stared out of the window. She had no reason to believe that he cared for her—or that he ever would care—and she hoped now that it was that way. It would be so much easier for them both. She would love him always, because that love had come into her life for always—but he would never know. It was her love that was taking her to him to-night—but he would not know that either. And Roy? It was not Roy's fault. But—but—oh, what would be the end of it all?

Her mind worked on and on relentlessly, and it was almost in a startled way that she realized the taxi had drawn up to the curb and had come to a halt. She got out and paid her fare, adding a tip that was moderate enough, she thought, to be in keeping with her appearance. The taxi rattled away. A little to her surprise, but also to her relief, the man had not seemed to take the slightest interest in her. Well, after all, why should he? He probably drove a lot of queer people in a day. She would not hesitate the

next time if she ever required a taxi again under like circumstances!

She walked rapidly along the block that separated her from Eighty-third Street, and on reaching the corner took the natural turn into the cross street. She had no means of knowing whether the house with the "To Let" sign was in the direction toward East End Avenue or whether it was west of Avenue A, nor on which side of the street it was. She only knew that it was "near" Avenue A, and that she would have to search for it until she found it.

She walked a little way down the street without result, then crossed over and went back on the other side of the street to the avenue, with still no sign of what she sought. She then did precisely the same thing on both sides west of the avenue, but with no greater success.

Grim little lines formed at the corner of her mouth. And she had even been afraid that there might have been more than one "To Let" sign! Well, she would have preferred that alternative to no sign at all! What was the matter? What was wrong? She was positive that she had made no mistake. This was the street, and the house should be here somewhere. Perhaps she had interpreted the "near" too narrowly and had not extended the search far enough away from the avenue—yes, that must be the reason; there couldn't be any other. She would try that now, anyhow. Thank Heaven there was scarcely anyone

about, or her crossing and recrossing of the street and avenue would be sure to attract attention!

She began her circuit again, and came suddenly upon the object of her search. Yes, there it was—a house "To Let." It was a little farther from the avenue in this direction than she had been before, that was all. She had been right in her surmise.

Swiftly, critically, she surveyed the house. The dark curtainless windows were like blind eyes staring out into the night. Blind eyes! How did she know? It was quite possible that she was being watched at this moment from within. The house wasn't empty in spite of its "To Let" sign and its desolate appearance!

Her pulse began to quicken. There was something suddenly foreboding about the house; but, too, she noted with some relief that it had a basement entrance beneath the stoop which would shield her from observation from the houses across the street and to a very large extent from any passers-by as well.

She glanced now up and down the street. There was no one near at hand, and she stepped down to the basement door. It was quite dark here and she could scarcely see at all. She began to feel with her hand around the jamb of the door.

There was only one way to get in. She had no skeleton keys and no burglarious tools—which latter she would not have known how to use in any event. Yes, here it was! Her hand closed on the bell knob

and pulled it—and, listening, she heard a faint, responsive jangle from within.

Her automatic was snuggling in her right hand now. She did not expect the door bell in an empty and untenanted house to be answered—at least in the usual way. Batty Rose was not fool enough for that; but if she persisted in ringing it would lure him to the other side of the door and that was all she wanted. She had an "open sesame" then that would do the rest.

She rang again—and still again. And now she kept her ear pressed against the door panel. Yes, she was sure of it—there was a stealthy movement from within—from quite close to the other side of the door.

"Batty!" she called in an undertone. "Batty! Open the door!"

There was no answer—and now no sound.

"Batty, you fool, there's someone coming, and I'll be seen!" Her voice was sharp, imperative, raised a little. "Open the door—quick! I've got a message from Izzy Myers."

And then the door opened silently upon a black interior—and she entered.

CHAPTER X

A House "To Let"

THE door closed softly behind her. Batty Rose could not be more than arm's length away. From where she stood and by feeling out around her to locate his position, she knew she was near enough to touch the man—but she could not see him. It was as though some black curtain of heavy, impenetrable texture hung between them. It was so dark that even if she had known exactly where he stood and had had him covered with her automatic, he could have leaped aside or even upon her before she would have been aware of what he was about. True, she might shoot him, but he was at the moment too valuable for that —it was an amenable, not a dead, Batty Rose that she wanted.

His voice reached her now in a snarling whisper:

"Say, it's damned funny, Izzy sending a skirt around here! Who t'hell are youse, anyway? An' wot d'youse want?"

"I told you what I wanted," Enid answered tartly. "You took a long time to open that door!"

"Yes! Wot d'youse think we're doing here—holding public receptions?"

"I don't know about that," she complained; "but that's no reason for taking the risk of letting somebody see me out there. People aren't in the habit of ringing the door bells of vacant houses at night for nothing. You ought to have known! Haven't you got a light around here somewhere?"

"Youse've got a flip tongue, ain't youse!" he snapped. "Vacant houses ain't in de habit of answering door bells, an' vacant houses don't have any lights showing neither. Youse cut out de gab an' come across! Where's dat message from Izzy Myers?"

"Sure, I'll come across!" she answered sharply. "You're the one that's wasting time! You can't read in the dark, can you? I guess you've got lights in here somewhere where they won't be seen from outside."

"Yes, sure, I've got one"—there was a sudden menace in his voice—"an' I guess I'll use it to take a look at youse before I do anything else! It's damned funny Izzy sending a skirt around here like dis!"

"That's what you said before!" She was jeering at him now, prodding him to action. "Well, what are you going to do about it? Stand there all night? Izzy'll be pleased! If you give me the answer to his message to-morrow morning some time, it will be all right—that's why I came down here in a hurry when there wasn't time for him to find anybody else!"

"Close yer face, an' feel yer way along de wall," growled Batty Rose. "I wouldn't even strike a match down here, 'cause there's a window off the hall an' it

might be spotted. We'll get a light upstairs where it's safe. Get a move on!"

"All right!" she said airily, and began to grope her way down the hall.

How inky black it was! And there was something that chilled her blood in the sound of those footsteps following there behind her. Fear came suddenly. Her fingers tightened over her automatic. Yes—that brought reassurance. She had gained admittance to the house and played her part well enough with Batty Rose so far—and—and Phil was here somewhere. She must not lose her poise now. In a minute or two more, when there was light enough to *see*, she would have an ally, even if an unwilling one, to join her in Phil's rescue!

Her foot struck the riser of a stair and she stumbled. Behind her Batty Rose laughed raucously.

"Didn't I tell youse we was going upstairs? Can't youse lift yer feet?"

She made no answer as she recovered herself and went on; but at the head of the stairs she paused.

"I can't see anything," she said. "I don't know where to go."

"Wait where youse are, den," he replied gruffly.

She felt him brush by her, and a moment later, as he struck a match, she saw that he was standing a few yards away in what seemed to be a sort of recess in the hall, and that he was reaching out with the

match to light a candle that stood on a ledge of some kind against the wall.

She stepped quietly, swiftly forward. The candle wick spurted into yellow flame.

"Now we'll take a look at youse," he said as he straightened up.

Her hand shot forward, the muzzle of her automatic on a line with his eyes.

"Better look at *this!*" she said in a hard, metallic monotone.

He drew back with a startled oath.

"Hell!" he flung out furiously. "I thought dere was something phony about it, but, at dat, youse've put one over, ain't youse, blast youse! Wot's de idea, an' who are youse?"

He was not a prepossessing looking object—her impression was that of a hulking figure with a bullet head and close-cropped black hair and small black eyes that squinted under drooping lids.

"Never mind who I am," she said coldly. "Put your hands up over your head."

"Nix!" he said sullenly. "Not for a skirt! Look out dat thing don't go off an' frighten youse! An' maybe dere's mice in here too"—he was edging slightly toward her—"dere ain't nobody been living in de house for a long time!"

"There'll be one who won't be living in it much longer if you make any move other than to do as you are told," she said icily. "I don't want to hurt

you—perhaps because I am only a nervous woman as you suggest; but, on the other hand, because I *am* a woman and have to choose between you and Phil Martin, whom you've got hidden somewhere in this house, you will perhaps understand, though you may never have heard the quotation, that I am more deadly than the male. Put your hands up!"

He stared at her, his jaw sagging.

"So dat's de lay, is it?" He was mumbling now in a curious, puzzled way. "Wot's de likes of youse got to do wid him? He wouldn't travel around wid a bag like youse for a sweetie, an' youse don't look like youse was his mother or his aunt, 'cause youse don't look like nothing at all except a freak dat had been on a bat an' needed a wash."

"Put your hands up!"

For an instant he hesitated, then suddenly reading something in her eyes that decided him abruptly, he hastily lifted his hands above his head.

"Now turn around with your back to me," she ordered curtly, "and keep your hands where they are!"

Again he obeyed her.

The muzzle of her automatic bored into the small of his back. She found his revolver in a holster at his belt and, removing the weapon, placed it in the pocket of her coat. Then she picked up the candle and stepped back from him.

"You'll need your hands in a moment, so put them

down!" She was clipping off her words. "Now turn around, and lead the way to where you've got Phil Martin."

He swung around, his hands at his sides, and shook his head.

"Youse've got de wrong dope," he said roughly; "dere ain't no Phil Martin here."

Enid's lips firmed in a hard smile.

"You're a little too late with that, aren't you?" she inquired coldly. "You tacitly admitted a moment ago that he was here. But in any case I know that he is a prisoner in the house. Furthermore, I know that Izzy Myers and the Big Shot are coming here tonight. I don't know when, but I know I have no time to lose—so you will either take me to him at once, or I shall have to look for him myself."

"Well"—a sneer was creeping over Batty Rose's face—"why don't youse, den?"

"Because," she said, "I have no means of tying you up, and there would be only one alternative. I am a fairly good shot, and I think I could disable you enough to answer the purpose without the wound necessarily proving fatal—but that would be your risk. Will you lead the way—or not?"

He cursed at her now, clenching his fists.

"I believe youse would!" he snarled. "I'd like to get my hands on youse for dis, an' some day I hopes to Gawd I does. Youse'll get wot's——"

"I am going to count three," she said tersely. "One!"

"He's down dere in dat room at de end of de hall, where de door's shut," said Batty Rose hurriedly.

"Lead the way, then, and open the door!"

"Yes, but"—Batty Rose was pleading now—"youse'll put out dat light, won't youse? Dere ain't supposed to be nobody in dis house an' going along de hall wid it somebody might lamp it from de street."

She laughed at him derisively, impatiently.

"I didn't think you were a big enough fool to try to get away with that!" she said. "It doesn't matter to me who sees the light—I want to see *you*. Now, go ahead!"

For an instant he hung back, glaring at her in vicious rage; and then, muttering savagely under his breath, he stepped out from the recess into the hall, and started toward the rear of the house.

Holding the candle above her head and with her automatic outflung before her, Enid followed him, keeping just far enough in the rear so that he could not whirl upon her unexpectedly.

The candle did not give much light; it cast queer, unearthly shadows. Their footsteps sounded loud and hollow on the bare flooring. Enid's face, under the strain, was set and white. A strange procession, she thought, they must have made here in the shadows and semidarkness—that hulking figure still raging

under his breath as he moved along; and she with her candle, her automatic, and her grotesque garb!

Batty Rose halted before a closed door.

"He's in here," he flung out over his shoulder surlily; "but de door's locked."

"Unlock it, then!" she ordered levelly. "There is no one but you who would have the key."

"Who said I hadn't?" he snarled. "Gimme a chance!"

She watched him narrowly as he took a key from his pocket and introduced it in the lock. It seemed to stick. Once or twice he turned it ineffectually, grumbling and cursing at it—then suddenly, quick as the winking of an eye, he swung the door inward, leaped through, and slammed it shut behind him.

And with the current of air from the slamming of the door the candle in Enid's hand flickered and went out.

CHAPTER XI

Over Tapped Wires

LIKE one dazed and stunned, Enid stood there for a moment motionless in the darkness. She heard Batty Rose's footsteps racing away on the other side of the closed door. And then impulsively she flung the door open, and stepped forward. What was the good of doing that!—Batty Rose wasn't here, for now she heard him clattering downstairs, the back stairs, obviously, that were reached through what the sense of touch told her was this short, narrow passageway in which she now stood. And Phil, of course, wasn't here either—and never had been!

She moved back into the hall. The bare floors were like sounding boards. She could hear Batty Rose running madly along the lower hall now toward the front of the house. She gave a queer little impotent cry. There was no way of heading him off, though instinctively she started back along the hall toward the head of the front stairs that led to the basement. Fire down the stairway at him in the darkness? What chance would there be of hitting him? And, besides, she was too late, anyway. She heard him now wrench

the basement door to the street open, heard it bang as it was precipitately shut again—and then silence.

She was alone in the house, except for—she choked back a sudden sob in her throat—except for Phil Martin. That door had probably never been locked at all! It wasn't that she had been careless or had ignored the possibility that Batty Rose would attempt to turn the tables on her by whatever means his cunning could devise; but his apparent difficulty with the key had been so natural, and his subsequent plunge through the doorway so swift and unexpected, that she had not realized what had happened until the door stood shut between them. She had been neatly tricked. And now he was gone—obviously for only one purpose: to communicate with Izzy Myers, or the Big Shot, or some other members of the gang.

How long would it be before some of them were back, enough of them—who wouldn't be unarmed the way Batty Rose was now—not only to prevent Phil Martin from escaping, but to trap her as well? How long? How long? How long? The words were drumming at her brain. Not very long! Not, perhaps, long enough—and she was standing here inactive while the seconds were flying by!

"Phil!" she cried out wildly. "Phil!" His Christian name came spontaneously to her lips. "Phil! Where are you?"

There was no answer.

No, of course, there would be no answer! A man

who had been gagged couldn't answer—and that was what Izzy Myers had said they had done to Phil. She would have to find him—light the candle again and find him.

But she had no matches.

There must be some somewhere, though. That ledge where Batty Rose kept the candle—there should be matches there!

She dropped her automatic into the pocket of her coat to free her hand and began to grope her way back along the hall, hurrying as fast as she could, guiding herself by keeping contact with the wall. She reached the recess and felt hurriedly with her hand along the ledge. Nothing! Again her fingers searched the ledge, anxiously, carefully, inch by inch this time.

There were no matches here.

For a moment her heart sank, and a low cry of despair broke from her lips as she set the now useless candle down on the ledge. She did not know where else to look. Batty Rose must have taken the match he had used from his own pocket—there were none here.

What was she to do? Even with a light to aid her in her search for Phil she was not sure she could win her race against time; but in this pitiless blackness where she could see nothing, where she could only grope forward blindly every foot of the way, where she could not even come upon the doors to the rooms

except through the sense of touch, it seemed as though all hope of success was ruthlessly, mercilessly swept away. Dismay surged upon her—then fear, an agony of it. What was she to do?

"Try, you little coward!" an inner voice prompted contemptuously. "You'll never find him by standing there! Try! Suppose there are a dozen rooms in the house, how do you know you wouldn't have the luck to find him in the very first one you entered? Try!"

It was like a whiplash, that voice. It spurred her on. She was in instant action.

She began to *run*—with her hand rubbing along the side of the wall. What did it matter if she fell? She must go quickly. There was no time to go any other way, for there were too many rooms to search. There was this floor here, and the one below, and—she remembered having seen that there was an upper story when she had inspected the house from the outside—and the one above. Phil might be on any one of the three floors—she had nothing to guide her in that respect. She could only begin with the first room she came to, and thereafter take them in turn as long as she had time, or—or until she found Phil. Her hand would tell her when she came to a door, and——

Here was one now!

She halted; and her fingers, feeling along the edge of the door near the jamb, sought and found the door knob. She swung the door wide open—and, in sudden uplift, gave a little cry of relief. It wasn't to be

so hopeless after all! Each room wouldn't have to be searched by the sense of touch. It would have taken such endless time to do that, and that was what she had been so much afraid of. True, it was still dark and murky, but she could at least see that no one was lying bound there upon the floor. She had forgotten the windows. The intense blackness in the halls was due to the fact that all the doors of the rooms were closed. Each room would have a window, and, dim and faint as it was, the night light in the windowed rooms would be like noonday compared with the utter blackness she had experienced before.

And now through this window she caught the reflection of a street light. This was the front room then, the one whose window she had noticed was just on a level with the stoop at the front entrance. She could go no farther, then, in this direction.

Leaving the door open, as she meant now to leave all the doors open behind her in order to dispel as much of the darkness as possible, she crossed the hall, expecting to find another room opposite the one she had just left—and came instead to the foot of the staircase leading to the upper floor. She paused then for an instant in indecision. Should she go up or down? Should she explore first the other rooms on this floor back to that door through which Batty Rose had escaped and which opened on the passage that led to the back stairs, and then search the basement—or should she go up to the floor above?

Her hesitation had been more mental than physical, for she had scarcely paused at all. She found herself running up the stairs. Perhaps it was a hint of superstition in her nature that had prompted the decision. There was no other reason—nothing to tell her where Phil was. She had intended to work her way back along the hall, but had found herself confronted by the stairs instead. Perhaps it was *meant* that she should find the stairs in front of her! The drowning man and the straw, of course! Well, she had grasped at it!

She reached the head of the stairs, and now she was trailing her hand again along the wall in search of a door. A moment more and she had found one. She opened it and looked inside. Her eyes had grown more accustomed to the darkness now, and it took scarcely a second to assure herself that the room was empty.

On she went again. How long had she been now? She dared not attempt to answer her own question. If she could only hold the minutes back! What a terrifying noise her footsteps made! The echoes seemed to come from everywhere—as though the house were full of people running frantically about in all directions.

Another door! The same result. And then the end of the hall! And now back again on the opposite side! How many rooms were there? Would she ever be able to search them all? There seemed to be so many

—so many! And there *couldn't* be much time left now. It was certain that Batty Rose would have been able to get into almost instant touch with some of the gang, even if Izzy Myers and Roy were not located. It wouldn't take them long to get here—in a car—from, say, their hangout at Izzy Myers's place. Would she——

Another door! The hollow echo of her footsteps died away as she halted, groping for the door knob—and suddenly out of the silence there came a sound that set her heart to beating furiously and her hand to trembling in its frantic haste as it moved across the panels.

Someone was inside there.

The sound was very faint, an almost indefinable sound—just a sound of movement. Oh, where was the door knob? Suppose—suppose the door was locked! No, it wouldn't be locked. There would have been no object in locking it.

Her fingers touched and closed upon the door knob, turned it, and the door swung open. And then, while a second passed, she stood upon the threshold straining her eyes through darkness. Something bulked and took shape and form before her—a man was lying there on the floor in the centre of the room.

"Phil!" she cried out almost inarticulately—and the next instant was on her knees beside the figure on the floor. Her hands felt over the man's face—felt over the gag there. She reached then for the

knots at the back of his head, and the man, to aid her efforts, turned with difficulty upon his side. She began to struggle with the knots. They would not seem to yield. Her fingers seemed useless, clumsy things. It *was* Phil, of course? It was too dark to see his face, but it must be Phil. What had brought that thought, the possibility that it might be someone else, into her mind? The knots were yielding now. She tore the gag away.

"Phil!" she cried again. "It *is* you, Phil, isn't it?"

"Yes." He spoke with difficulty, thickly. "Yes; but who are you?"

She was feeling over the cords that bound his arms and legs. The knots here frightened her. They were too many and too hard for her fingers.

"Oh, never mind about who I am!" she answered urgently. "Have you got a knife?"

"In my vest pocket—lower right," he said; and then: "I know who you are now. I know your voice. You are—are Enid."

"Yes," she said.

A little sob rose chokingly in her throat. He was Phil. She was Enid. She repeated that over to herself. It seemed to have come so naturally—to them both. It brought her a strange glow of happiness—and a hurt like the probing of a wound. She must not let herself think about it.

She found the knife and, opening it, began to cut and slash at the cords that bound him.

"How did you know I was here?" he asked eagerly. "How did you find me?"

"There is no time for questions," she told him hurriedly. "Batty Rose will be back at any moment."

The cords around his arms and body were freed now, and he raised himself to a sitting position.

"Batty!" he exclaimed. "Full name Batty Rose, is it? Yes, I know him!" There was a sudden grimness in his voice. "I've a small account to settle with Batty Rose! He did me the honour of laying me out with a blackjack!"

"Oh!" She drew in her breath sharply.

"So he's gone out, has he? But that doesn't explain how you *got in!*" His voice was eager again. "I don't understand! How did you know anything about my being here? How could you? I——"

"Please!" she protested, as she continued to cut desperately at the cords. "Oh, please don't ask questions now. There isn't a moment to spare."

"Well, give me the knife, then," he said; "I'll probably be able to do the rest quicker than you can." He took the knife from her, and after a moment spoke again: "All set! Would you mind giving me a boost up? I'm afraid I'm a little stiff—circulation, you know."

"Can you walk?" she asked anxiously, as she helped him to his feet.

"Of course I can," he answered cheerily. He took a step forward a little unsteadily, leaning upon her,

and then another. "I'm not nearly so bad as I thought I'd be—just cramped a bit. By the time we're downstairs I'll be able to do a sprint; but"—his hand was tightening as though in glad possession over hers—"before I go anywhere near so far as that, there's something I want to say to you. Enid, no matter how you knew about it, you must have run an appalling risk in coming here—for me. I——"

There was a throb in his voice that she dared not, must not listen to.

"You are not to talk about that, either," she interrupted in almost a panic. "We must get out of this house just as quickly as we can. Have you any matches?"

"No; I'm afraid not." He laughed shortly. "As a matter of fact, that's why I'm here!"

"Why you're——?" She checked herself. There was no time—no time! "Well, it doesn't matter so much now—I mean about the matches," she said hastily. "We'll be able to find our way, all right; but with a light, even a match light, we would have been able to go more quickly, that is all."

Her hand was still in his, still tightly clasped there. He needed to be helped along, he was still none too well able to walk alone. She felt the colour flame into her cheeks, and for the first time that night was thankful for the darkness. She was a little hypocrite! She withdrew her hand from his resolutely now, and

substituted for it Batty Rose's revolver, which she took from the pocket of her coat.

"Take this," she said.

"A rod!" he ejaculated whimsically. He was teasing a little now. "The one of last night?"

Last night! The words seemed to startle her strangely. It couldn't have been last night, could it? Last night was ages and ages away—in another world.

"It belonged to Batty Rose," she said.

His flash of whimsicality was gone. He whistled low under his breath.

"Good God—Batty Rose!" he exclaimed heavily. "I understand less and less of this. I don't get it at all. Enid, what's the answer? You've got to——"

Again she cut him short.

"We're not out of here yet!" she urged wildly. "I don't know how much time is left. I don't know when they'll be back. Don't think of anything else!" She was almost pulling him forward. "Oh, come! Come! Come!"

"All right!" He gave a reassuring little laugh. "I had no intention of putting the brakes on our exit by asking questions; and if you feel that way about it, we'll wait for explanations until we are safe out on the street. Where are the stairs? Can you see at all?"

"No," she replied; "but I know where they are." She led the way gropingly out of the room and across

the hall. Out on the street! Yes, she would have to answer questions then! She had only staved them off for a few minutes. What was she going to say to him—out on the street? Her hand came in contact with the stair rail. "Here!" she said. "Feel for the rail. Have you got it?"

"Yes," he said.

"Well, then, be careful," she cautioned. "Are you sure you can go down all right?"

"I'm as good as ever I was," he assured her. "I wasn't trussed up so very long, you know."

They began to descend the stairs—and near the bottom Phil Martin spoke again as he misjudged a tread.

"Lord, it's black!" he said. "I don't see how you ever found me."

"I was beginning to be afraid I never would," she admitted.

"But you *did!*"

That throb was in his voice again.

"Yes." She scarcely knew what she was saying. "Keep your hand well ahead of you on the rail. I think there are only two or three more steps. The front door faces the stairs, so keep straight on. It may be locked, but——"

The words died on her lips, and she stood still as though suddenly riveted to the spot, her face blanching, her fingers clutched tightly at her companion's arm.

From somewhere below, but from quite close at hand, there had come a mocking laugh. And now a voice came jeering out of the darkness:

"Hello, lady, how'd youse like yer little walk? Dem dainty footsteps of yers didn't make no noise at all—so of course I didn't know where youse was all de time!"

She knew the voice. But it was incredible. She had not heard anyone come *into* the house.

"Batty Rose!" she exclaimed numbly.

"Sure!" he gloated. "Maybe youse handed me one when youse came in, but maybe youse've got it back again now! Youse thought I went out—but I didn't! D'youse think I was fool enough ever to leave de house an' give youse a chance to make a getaway an' hand a spiel to de police?"

She did not answer for a moment. Phil Martin's lips were pressed close to her ear, his whisper so low that she could barely catch the words:

"Keep him talking!"

The words frightened her a little. What was Phil going to do? He seemed to be crouching down now. She must play up to him, of course! The fact that Batty Rose had not given the alarm did not afford very much relief—some time, now or an hour from now, Izzy Myers and the Big Shot were coming here anyway.

She flung a contemptuous laugh at Batty Rose.

"I don't think you're so very bright!" she said

mockingly. "We are two to one, and both of us are armed."

"Is dat so?" he retorted sneeringly. "Well, don't fool yourself dat de rod youse pinched off me was de only one in de house—'cause it wasn't! See? An' youse won't get no chance to use yers 'cause youse can't hit me where I am. An' maybe"—Batty Rose had obviously been sorely flicked on the raw—"I ain't so bright, but youse can't get to de front door, or go back along de hall neither, without getting plugged. I've got youse cold, an' if youse makes a move youse gets yers. Youse've got dat straight, ain't youse?"

She had located him now. He was inside that front room and protected by the wall at the edge of the doorway, where, as he had said, he could command both the front entrance and enough of the hall to prevent any attempt to reach the rear of the house. Her lips drew suddenly tight together. Phil was gone now—without a sound. He had thrust his shoes, attached together by their laces, into her hand.

She laughed again—loudly—to drown out the unlucky creaking of some board perhaps, or perhaps a misstep that Phil might make.

"You're a brave man, Batty!" she taunted. "I know where you are. While you're inside the doorway of that front room"—this for Phil's benefit—"you're fairly safe from a shot. But be very, *very* careful not to expose yourself, won't you?"

"Aw, shut yer map!" he snarled. "I've told youse wot youse'll get if youse makes a move!"

"Yes," she went on with a gibe in her voice, "and if we daren't move and you daren't move, what a pleasant little party it is going to be! Would you mind very much if we sat down on the stairs since we're going to spend the rest of the night here?"

"Youse can sit down if youse likes—but it won't be for long!" he said viciously. "Youse said yerself dat Izzy Myers and de Big Shot was coming here to-night, but youse won't even have to wait for dem. Dere's some friends of mine dat I was talking to while youse was nosing around de house, dat are on dere way here now on de jump. An', say, wot's de matter wid yer boy friend dat youse does all de talking? I hope nobody pushed dat stopper so far into his mouth dat he'll need a doctor—'cause he won't get one!"

Where was Phil? She must keep on talking without the slightest pause, keep Batty Rose talking, keep on distracting his attention from everything but herself.

She raised her voice in well-simulated fury.

"You are a miserable brute!" she cried. "But never mind about him now. I want to tell you that I don't believe one word of what you said about communicating with some of your friends, by which I suppose you mean some of your cowardly gang!"

"Don't youse?"

"No, I don't! The only way you could have done it,

since you didn't go out, was to have telephoned—and vacant houses haven't got telephones."

Batty Rose laughed raucously.

"Lady, youse gives me a pain! Maybe dere ain't no number in de telephone book, an' maybe de company don't make no charge, not bein' wise to it; but youse've got another guess coming just de same. See? Maybe youse've heard of tapped wires? Well, dat's wot's wot, an'——"

His words ended abruptly in a curious sort of long-drawn sigh. Came then the thump as of some heavy body falling on the floor—and, for an instant, silence.

And then, while Enid held her breath, waiting, Phil's voice reached her—with just a trickle of grim laughter in its tones:

"You're a peach, Enid! The trick goes to you. I got in a lucky one with the revolver butt. He's out for the next few minutes. Give me my shoes, will you?"

"I—I——" She found her voice faltering suddenly as she mechanically descended the few remaining stairs, and, groping out toward him, handed him the shoes. "I——" Perhaps it was the reaction from suspense, relief from the dread of what might have happened to him that tied her tongue—and she wanted to say so much. She clenched her hands tightly. She mustn't let herself go! "I'll get the front door open if I can, while you are putting on your shoes," she said quickly.

"Yes, go ahead!" he agreed.

She made her way to the door and tried it. It was locked, and the key had been taken away. But now she had herself in hand again. She returned then to where she could just dimly make him out as he sat on the floor near the doorway of the front room.

"It's locked," she stated calmly. "And I suppose the basement entrance will be locked, too. I don't know anything about the rear of the house, but there's another way out. It would be an easy drop to the ground from the window in the front room here."

"Good idea!" he applauded. "See if you can unfasten it; if you can't, we'll smash the glass. I'll have this lace tied in a jiffy. Look out you don't trip over Batty Rose—he's lying somewhere inside the doorway."

"I hear him," she said, as the man suddenly began to breathe stertorously.

She entered the room and, guided by the reflection of the street light, went swiftly to the window. She found the catch, unfastened it—and, about to open the window itself, suddenly drew back to one side. An open car, swerving swiftly to the curb, was drawing up just a little beyond the front of the house. And now as she watched, its occupants, two men—two of the gang obviously, for neither of them was Izzy Myers nor the Big Shot—got out of the car and came hurrying back toward the house.

"Quick!" she called tensely. "Quick, they're coming now!"

Phil's voice answered her almost from her elbow.

"I see them!" he said coolly. "They'll use the basement entrance, of course—they won't want to be seen on the steps. Yes—there they are under the stoop now!"

She felt him reach out past her to the window. Suppose they rang the bell and stood there waiting for Batty Rose to answer! Well, as an alternative, there were back windows as well as this one! But, no—they obviously had a key! She heard the basement door open now; and now a voice came hoarsely, excitedly from below:

"Hey, Batty! Batty!"

But the next instant, with the window wrenched open, she had clambered over the sill and, with Phil following closely, had dropped to the ground.

CHAPTER XII

Against the Wall

THE car! The car the two gangsters had parked at the curb! Enid, running, headed toward it with Phil keeping pace beside her. That window had probably not been opened for many months, and the two men must have heard the noise it made—it had creaked so. And, besides, both she and Phil had not alighted on the ground without making more noise.

She glanced over her shoulder. Yes, there they were —just emerging from the basement door. And now, leaping up to the pavement, they were in pursuit.

It was only a few yards from the house to the car. Would there be time to start the car? Or was it idling?—it was a habit of such men as these to leave their engines running.

"Quick!" she panted. "Check them with a shot over their heads. I can drive. Give me time to start the car if necessary."

"Right!" he flung back tersely, and, half turning as he ran, the flame tongue of his revolver cut through the semidarkness, and the roar of the report racketed up and down the street.

It was the second's respite that she needed. She had reached the car now, and, as she flung herself at the wheel, a sidelong glance showed her that both men had instinctively hesitated and were holding back.

The engine *was* idling! She threw in the clutch, and as Phil Martin leaped in beside her the car, like an animal under the prod of a spur, sprang away from the curb.

Shots came then—execrations, savage oaths. The two men were furiously emptying their weapons. She crouched low over the wheel, her lips tight together in a straight line. Last night like this she had not escaped unscathed! A bullet shattered the wind shield. But the car was speeding now—faster than she had ever driven a car before in her life.

The shots were dying away in the distance. She swung around a corner, sped along the block, turned another corner, and still another. She was imbued with only one purpose now—to double and turn and throw any further pursuit off the track.

And then she felt her arm pressed significantly, and, slowing the car, she pulled up to the curb.

"Yes," she said breathlessly, as the car came to a stop, "I suppose we are quite safe now. What shall we do with the car—leave it here?"

He was staring at her with troubled, anxious eyes.

"Enid," he said hoarsely, "where did you get those clothes—that *hat?*"

Her hands gripped on the wheel, gripped and tightened there until her knuckles were like rows of white knobs under the tight-drawn skin. She had forgotten her hat, her clothes, her spectacles, her grime-streaked face and hands, her, to say the least of it, bizarre appearance, in the danger and excitement of the escape; and, back there in the house, of course, the darkness had protected her, and he had recognized her only by her voice. What was she to say? What *was* there to say? She had already staved off his questions several times after she had found him there in that room. She couldn't do that any more, could she?—with this strange masquerade of hers obviously making those questions more imperative than ever in his mind! She stared out through the splintered wind shield. How curiously it made the street and window lights look! She made no answer. No words would come.

He paid her an unconscious compliment.

"I would have passed you anywhere on the street without knowing you," he said. "What does it mean, Enid—this disguise, I suppose you'd call it, that you've put on? It had something to do, of course, with to-night, with being in that house, with finding me. Tell me!"

She tried to smile, but it was a miserable failure; and then, out of her agony of mind she answered almost hysterically:

"Oh, I can't! I can't—not now!"

He misunderstood her. He laid his hand gently over one of hers where it still gripped fiercely at the wheel.

"I'm a brute to prod you with questions after what you've just been through," he said contritely. "It's the reaction, of course. If you weren't the brick you are you'd have gone completely to pieces instead of taking it anywhere near as corkingly as you are doing." He infused a sudden lightness into his voice. "Worse than big game in the Rockies, wasn't it? Never mind! You'll be all right in a few minutes—you can tell me about it then. Meanwhile, you asked me about the car. It's probably a stolen car, so the license number won't help any; but the police will want to look it over anyway. We'll drive it over to the police station and make a report about that house—get a detail down there on the run, you know, if the gun battle hasn't already been responsible for a riot call!"

The police! The word seemed to go through her like a galvanic shock. It meant disaster, utter and absolute. It meant exposure! How could she explain to the police? And then there was Roy to consider! She cried out sharply now:

"The police! How can I go to the police like this? What would they say when they had washed my face and taken my spectacles away? And even if I could satisfy them, think what it would mean! The notoriety, the sensationalism of it! And why should I go?

Batty Rose and his gang would then know who I was. Why should I appear in the matter at all? Why should——"

"Don't!" he protested with a wry grimace. "I'm afraid I'm what you called Batty Rose—not very bright! I wasn't thinking of that phase of it, but I am sure I would have 'come to' before I had let you get that far into the limelight. As a matter of fact, I wasn't thinking of anything except that it was up to me to get into touch with the police and also with the 'desk'—my paper, you know—and my suggestion was just blurted out because under ordinary circumstances it was more or less the natural thing to do. I certainly *don't* want you to be known in the matter, and you certainly won't be if I can help it. There's another and even quicker way out of it. You wait for me here in the car while I run into the nearest store and telephone. I've *got* to give my paper whatever there is of a scoop in this, and naturally I've got to talk to the police and tell them we've left the car here. That's the best thing to do with it. Afterward I'll get you home any way you like. How will that do?"

She did not answer for a moment. This was almost as bad, wasn't it? The police would go to the house and put some of their men in charge there—and Roy, sometime during the night, was to go there. He would walk right into a trap. No! What was the matter with her! She did not seem to be able to think clearly.

The shooting would have aroused the neighbourhood and brought the patrolman on post to the spot, anyhow. The two gangsters would have made their escape, and Batty Rose would, or would not, have recovered his senses in time to do likewise. If Roy started for the house any time within the next half hour there would still be enough excitement on the street to warn him away—and within half an hour at the most the Big Shot would certainly have been tipped off to what had happened by his own gangsters. The last thing Roy would therefore attempt to do would be to enter the "House To Let" to-night.

Relief came to her now in large measure, but there was still one other point that troubled her. When she had started out she had not anticipated any outcome such as this—a gun fight in public on the street.

"Yes, that's all right, but how are you going to keep me out of it in your newspaper account?" she asked. "What are you going to say to the police? There must be people who saw what happened, or enough of it anyway to know that a woman was there." She forced a challenging smile. "Is she to play the rôle of 'The Mysterious Woman'—in headlines?"

"You leave that to me," he said with quiet assurance. "She won't be Enid Howard, anyhow. I'll fix that all to the merry! And now what about it? Will you wait here for me? I won't be more than four or five minutes, and obviously the police won't be here

for the car before I'm back, since they won't know where it is until I've told them."

She shook her head.

"No," she said, "we'll abandon it together now. I'm afraid that splintered wind shield might attract attention. That man who just went by stared at it—or perhaps it was at me—rather curiously."

"Come on, then," he agreed, and helped her to alight from the car.

"Where are we?" she asked, as she started to walk along beside him.

"Don't you know?" he returned in surprise. "You didn't seem to hesitate much in your handling of the car."

"That's just it—I didn't," she said. "I didn't care where I was going so that I turned corners often enough."

"Well, it's Third Avenue," he told her. "And this store will do. It seems to have a telephone booth, which is——"

She caught his arm quickly. A taxicab was passing.

"Please hail that taxi," she requested.

"Why—what for!" he ejaculated, but mechanically he obeyed her. "I've got to telephone first."

"Yes," she said, "and I'm not at all anxious to go into the store, or stand here in the street either, dressed like this. I'll wait for you in the taxi."

Phil Martin's expression became suddenly one of apprehension.

"Look here," he said, as the taxi halted at the curb and the driver reached out and swung the door open, "you—you're not going to——"

"Give you the slip?" She smiled a little wanly. "Yes"—there was a tremor in her voice—"perhaps it would be better that way if I could—but I can't. You know where I live. I will wait for you."

He leaned toward her impulsively, taking both her hands, looking into her eyes.

"On your honour?" he demanded in a low voice.

"On my honour," she answered.

She was still standing at the curb as he left her and entered the store; and now she turned to the taxi driver.

"We'll wait until that gentleman comes back," she said; and then, accompanied by a bank note, she gave the man the corner of her street and Second Avenue as the address at which he was to stop and let her out. "You understand?" she ended.

"Sure!" he grinned. "I'm wise!"

She got into the taxi and sat down. She wanted to cry. She would have cried if it had not been for the driver sitting there on the other side of that glass partition. She dreaded this ride—with the man she loved. Yes, she wanted to cry. It wasn't only that she could explain nothing, tell him nothing—it was to be a parting. And he? Yes, she was afraid—and strangely, and oh, so unwisely glad—that he, too, cared. She was not blind. How could she be blind to

that! He had shown it so many times to-night—in his words, in his voice, in his manner, in the touch of his hand.

Her head hurt her. Mechanically she raised her hand, only to draw it back. Of course! Her head was bandaged. She had forgotten about that. Was she really Enid Howard?

And presently, when Phil Martin emerged from the store, she could not see him very well, for, though her spectacles and the dark interior of the cab would hide it from him she knew, there was a mist before her eyes; but her voice, as he paused at the side of the cab with the obvious intention of giving directions to the driver, was steady, almost casual as she forestalled him.

"I've told him where to go," she said.

"Oh, all right!" he said easily; then to the driver, as he stepped into the cab: "Let 'er go, son!"

The taxi started forward.

"Well, I've got that fixed up!" he announced buoyantly. "And now tell us all about it, Enid. There is no place like a taxicab for confidences. That's why they all rattle—so's the drivers can't hear!"

It was inevitable. It had to come sooner or later, before she left the cab. But—but it was so hard to face. If she could only put it off again—if even for a few more minutes. She wasn't very brave about it, but it was hard to be brave with a breaking heart.

And then suddenly she found herself speaking in

a voice so quiet and composed, but with just the right stress of eagerness, that it seemed somehow it could not be her own.

"No," she said, "I'd rather hear your story first. Tell me how they got you into that house."

"Why, don't you know?" he exclaimed.

"No."

"Then how did you——"

"I am supposed to be listening to *your* story," she reminded him. "How did it happen?"

He smiled a little ruefully.

"It was an old gag," he said. "The oldest there is. Matches! I told you that in the house. I'd just had a snack in Pete Lonezzi's spaghetti place with a police lieutenant friend of mine, who's just about as keen on getting his hands on the Big Shot as I am—in fact, that's what we'd been talking about while we were there. When I left him I started across town along Sixty-eighth Street. I don't know whether anyone saw it or not. There weren't many people about. A man, coming up from behind, asked me pleasantly enough for a match. I handed him my box—and he handed me one over the head with a blackjack. I went groggy; but I was just conscious enough to realize that a car had slipped up to the edge of the sidewalk, and that I was being bundled into it. When I got my senses back I was lying up there on the floor of that room nicely roped and gagged."

He paused for an instant, and laughed grimly.

"They thought I was still unconscious—and I let them think so. That's how I found out that the fellow who blackjacked me was called Batty—you supplied the surname. There were only two of them at this time, though how many were in the car and all that originally, I don't know. The other fellow answered to the name of Skinny. He coughed a lot. I didn't see either of them. They stood in the dark outside the room in the hall and yapped—but they yapped too much for their own good. I heard one or two things! I guess I came nearer meeting the Big Shot to-night than I have yet!"

"Yes?" she said a little faintly.

"Oh, *yes!*" he said, laughing grimly again. "That's what it was all about. In some way or other the Big Shot had got wind of what was going on between Shive Frank and me. One of the things I overheard Batty say was that the Big Shot was coming down there to have a little séance with me—and bump me off. Pleasant! Not exactly the way I'd figured I'd end up with the Big Shot! But never mind about that; I *didn't* end up that way, thanks to you—and I won't ever now. With the leads I've got to-night, that house, Skinny, Batty Rose, and other things they said, I'll have the Big Shot trapped in short order; and when I do—say, do you know what happened to-day?"

Was it the jolting of the taxi? Her head seemed

suddenly to be spinning around, a strange numbness to be settling upon her. She thought that she said "No"—but she was not sure.

"Well, I'll tell you! Shive Frank's wife came to see me. There was a lot Shive Frank knew about the Big Shot that he had never told me—things that he'd been mixed up in himself in the old days when he had been close to this Hal Varney—things he didn't dare tell for fear of getting into trouble himself. But he hated the Big Shot after the Big Shot had, as he claimed, double-crossed him, hated him far more even than I had ever imagined, and, it seems, had constantly nursed that hatred with the idea that some day he would have his full revenge—even if it wasn't until after he was dead! Perhaps he thought it would be *safer* then! What he had done was to put down on paper a record of the major crimes in which he and the Big Shot had been engaged together. Some time ago his wife discovered this. She told me she was scared stiff!

"You probably wouldn't have heard anything about it up in Winnipeg, but a number of years ago there was a particularly brutal murder of a man named Jonvers, a bootlegging affair, over on Long Island, that filled the papers for weeks and has been a mystery ever since. This was one of the things Shive had recorded—in detail. He took part in the crime himself, and was equally guilty—but it was this same Hal Varney, the Big Shot, who actually committed

the murder. Shive's wife hadn't any qualms where crime was concerned, and she's known to the police herself; but, strange as it may seem for a woman of her character, she was not only on the level with her husband, but she loved him in honest fashion and with the whole soul of her. At least, she says so, and I believe her. As I said, she was badly frightened when she found out what Shive had done. She was afraid somebody else might find out too—and that Shive would be 'hoist with his own petard.' She begged him to destroy the papers. He wouldn't listen to her. No one knew better than he did that, with the life he led, he was skirting the brink of eternity most of the time, and, in fact, from what he said to me once or twice, I think he had a premonition that he'd go for a ride some day, in which case, it is apparent now, those damning memoirs of his were to be a legacy —to damn the Big Shot. Finally Shive and his wife compromised. Shive was to seal up the papers and put them into safe keeping somewhere. This he did. He had an old crony named Schnaffner, a pawnbroker on the lower East Side. He got Schnaffner to put the packet in his safe and, without telling his pawnbroker friend what the packet contained, got Schnaffner to promise that it wouldn't be opened while he, Shive, was alive. This was some time ago. Lately, after he found out that I was after the Big Shot, he changed those instructions. He told both his wife and Schnaffner that if anything happened to him the

packet was to be delivered to *me*. You can see why, of course. He would have an executor, as it were, who, though for very different reasons, was as keen as he was on seeing the Big Shot put away.

"That's the story his wife told me this afternoon. She's glad now that Shive wrote those 'memoirs.' I don't know who handed him the spot last night, though I believe it was the gang he squealed on that I was telling you about in the Gondola; but *she* thinks it was the Big Shot's crowd. She was like a tigress. We went down to Schnaffner's place together, but Schnaffner is away until the end of the week, and of course they wouldn't hand over the packet. But two or three days do not count. What counts is that when we've got him behind the bars we'll have the goods on him for jobs we didn't know about before, and for one of them at least, that Jonvers killing, that will send him to the chair. You understand what all this means, don't you?"

He was talking about Roy. She fought frantically for self-control. *He was talking about Roy*. The chair! He had said that from what he had learned and heard to-night he would soon have the Big Shot trapped. For Roy's sake she must find out exactly what he meant to do. For Roy's sake she must not show any sign of agitation, for she must trick and play a double game with this man here—this man whom she loved.

"But you haven't got the Big Shot behind the bars

yet," she observed judicially. "You've never seen him, and you don't even know what he looks like. You said you heard Batty Rose and a man called Skinny talking. Did they say where the Big Shot lived?"

He shook his head.

"Oh, no; nothing near as good as that!" he smiled. "What they *said* may not amount to anything, just enough to give a rather hazy clue to some games they were up to that we may or may not be able to run down. It's the house and the two men themselves that are vital. The house can't answer questions, but its landlord or its owner can; and what with that, and running Batty Rose and Skinny to earth, it won't take long to dig the Big Shot out of his hole."

"But Skinny is a rather common sobriquet, isn't it?" she objected quietly.

"This Skinny coughs a lot!" he said significantly. "The police will comb the city for him. Don't you worry—it won't take long to find him!"

She barely suppressed a sigh of relief as she relaxed on her seat. It was bad enough, but it was not nearly so bad as she had feared. He still had no concrete knowledge of Roy's whereabouts that would lead to an *instant* arrest.

"I see!" she said.

"And then, on top of all that, there's you!" He was leaning toward her now. "Perhaps you will be able to help, too. In fact, I'm sure you will! It couldn't be otherwise—for the way in which you came to know

anything about that house, and how you knew I was there, is bound to uncover something. Tell me all about it, Enid. It's your turn now."

Yes, it was her turn now! She had been expecting it, knew it must come, yet now it came as a shock. For the moment her mind had been centred only upon the peril in which Roy stood. She moistened her lips, as she turned her head and looked out of the window. She couldn't tell just where they were, but they couldn't be very far from her corner now—not that she was any longer trying to postpone the inevitable, but it would make what was to come at least mercifully brief.

"There isn't anything I can tell you," she said dully.

"Nothing you can tell me! Are you joking?" he asked half lightly, half in a puzzled way.

"There isn't anything I can tell you," she repeated monotonously.

"But, Enid"—his voice had grown instantly troubled and anxious—"surely you can't mean that! You can't realize what you are saying! Nothing you can tell me! You—in that house! This—this sort of disguise you've put on! Don't you see that it——"

"I see everything!" she broke in, her words coming now in a sudden, almost hysterical outburst. "Everything! That what I have done to-night would even warrant the suspicion that—that I was one of the gang myself. And I know that my refusal to say

anything only makes it all the worse. But there is nothing that I can say. Nothing! Nothing!" She was biting at her lips. The tears were very near. "Oh, I don't know what you will think, but I cannot explain anything. Please, please do not ask me any more!"

His voice came to her quietly, reassuringly:

"To an outsider it might perhaps, as you say, seem a little suspicious; but to me, on the face of it, of course, that is a sheer absurdity. Listen, Enid! At least, tell me this. Did you know I was in that house when you went there?"

"Yes," she said.

"Of course you did!" he asserted with a sudden break in his voice. "And you went there for my sake!"

She was silent.

"Enid," his voice was getting out of control, "you —you should never have taken such a risk! Why didn't you tell the police?"

Again she was silent. She couldn't tell him that she was afraid the police would have waited there and caught Roy, could she?

"There is some simple explanation for it all, I know there is," he went on; "even though for some cause you feel you cannot speak. But don't you realize that if for no other reason than that you saved my life to-night I am in honour bound to respect your confidence? Can't you trust me?"

"Oh, please don't make me say it again!" she begged. "I cannot tell you anything."

Her hands were suddenly imprisoned in his, and suddenly he drew her close to him.

"Then trust me for another reason, Enid," he whispered passionately. "You have seen it to-night. You are a woman—you *know*. You know I love you. I loved you before to-night—almost from the moment I first saw you. My love is deeper, greater now at this instant, if that is possible, because of what you have done. You—you risked your life and more for me to-night. I love you, Enid. I love you!"

She closed her eyes. He had swept her into his arms. His lips burned like fire on hers. Perhaps the taxi driver saw. How little that mattered! Where was that vaunted boast of hers that he was never to know that she cared!

With a little moan she tore herself away.

"Don't! Oh, please, don't!" she said piteously. "There—there can never be anything like this between us. Oh, you are making it so hard—so hard! It is not a question of trust. I do trust you. I trusted you when I went to that house. I am trusting you now. If it were known that it was Enid Howard who was in that house to-night I would be in far greater danger than——"

"Yes, and that's what's driving me nearly mad!" he cried. "If it——"

"Wait!" she interrupted desperately. "Let me finish! I want to speak about you. You do not need any further warning to tell you that you are in danger.

You should know it only too well now. You said it was the Big Shot who had you taken to that house to-night. But don't you see? You are fighting in the dark. He knows you, and evidently knows what you are trying to do. But you don't know him. He will strike again. How are you going to protect yourself? Oh, why don't you keep out of this—leave him alone? Leave him to—to the police!"

"Scared off!" He laughed shortly. "Would you expect that of me? We won't talk about my danger. But I'll tell you now, if it will relieve your fears any, that he has had the only chance he'll ever get at me. There won't be another. He'll be cornered before he can strike again—at me or anyone else!"

She could find no words. They would have been useless, anyway. Nothing, she knew, would alter his determination. No man in like position, who was a man, would be "scared off." She twisted her hands together distractedly.

"Enid," he burst out, "what does it all mean? I can't understand! Not only about what has happened to-night, but what you said a moment ago—that there could never be anything between us. Don't you care? You must care! I *know* you care! You called me Phil when you entered that room. I shall never forget that. And no girl would do what you have done if she did not——" He broke off abruptly. The taxi had come to a stop, and the driver, reaching out, was opening

the door. "What's this!" he exclaimed in a startled way.

"I told him to stop here," she said. "It's my corner!"

"I—I don't understand!" he said heavily. "You mean that you don't want the cab to go to your house—that we will get out here and walk the rest of the way?"

There were tears on her cheeks, but she had herself well in hand now. There was one thing still to tell him; one danger that she could and must avert—the danger of Phil and Roy ever meeting in her house.

"No," she said in a low voice, "that is something you must *never* do. You must never go there, never call there. I cannot give you any explanation for this, either; but it would mean great danger, not only for you, but for me. And—and we must never be seen together any more. Please, please remember this—for both our sakes."

There was steel in the gray eyes—and a strange wistfulness—as they studied her.

"I know," he said slowly, as though measuring his words, "that in the old days, *our* old days, the days of the last few weeks, you would never even then let me go to your house—but there was always the Gondola. What you say now, though, would seem to mean almost—almost a final good-bye. Do you think I could let you go out of my life like this? You know I couldn't! And"—there was a ring in his voice now—

"furthermore I won't! If, because you say it would mean danger to you, I am not to go to your house, or meet you anywhere in public, when and where, then, am I to see you?"

When and where! This was the parting that she had known must come. A strange parting, since in the full meaning of the word she dared never *part* with him now! Duplicity! Trickery! But how, unless Phil remained a source of information, could she hope to save Roy from the police? How else could she stand between these two, Phil and Roy, and try to protect one from the other?

Her seat was the nearer to the curb—and suddenly now she stepped out of the cab.

"I have a telephone," she said, and sped around the corner.

CHAPTER XIII

Crooks in Council

WAS Roy back? Enid, standing outside the window through which she had left the Big Shot's home, listened intently. It wasn't likely. There was not a sound from within, and all the rear windows of the house were in darkness. If Roy had returned with the news of what had happened the household would hardly be wrapped now in sound and peaceful slumber! And, besides, she had made good time on her return journey from Martha Debbins's house where she had changed into her own clothes again. She had looked at her wrist watch just before she had turned into the lane here. It was not quite midnight.

For another moment she stood motionless, striving to catch the slightest sound, and then silently and quickly she climbed in over the sill. Inside the room she listened again. She could hear nothing—only the *silence* pounding at her eardrums. She closed the window noiselessly and, undressing swiftly in the dark, got into bed.

Sleep? How could she sleep? She was conscious of extreme physical weariness, but her brain was too

active, too greatly tormented, to permit of sleep, wasn't it? If only she could stop thinking for a little while! But from the moment she had left Phil in the cab her mind had been remorselessly at work. It had never stopped. It had seemed to follow a sort of cycle in which at one instant she encountered stray gleams of hope wherewith to buoy herself up, and at the next was left mentally blindfolded, wrestling impotently with dire, terrorizing problems to which she could find no answers.

It had never stopped. It would not stop now.

If it were ever known that it was she who had been in that house to-night the consequences would be unthinkable. Certainly Roy would not lift a finger on her behalf then—and Mrs. Kane and Izzy Myers were already intending to do away with her. Human life meant nothing. If one was in the way one was removed. Murder, to such people as Mrs. Kane and Izzy Myers, was not momentous—it was an incident. But any description Batty Rose could give of the woman who had been there could not possibly arouse even a suspicion that it was Enid Howard. Phil was the only one who knew. The secret was, of course, quite safe with Phil. Phil loved her. Phil cared. Phil! Oh, Phil! It was safe with him—but what did he think, what could he think, what must he think?

Her mind raced on. Thoughts of Phil were suddenly submerged as by some onrushing, awesome tidal wave that swept everything from its path. Jonvers!

They wanted Roy for *murder*—the murder of a man named Jonvers. Had one the right to try to protect even a brother when the crime was murder? But she did not believe it. She could not believe it. The Kane woman and a man like Izzy Myers would commit murder almost with indifference. She could understand that. They were running true to type. But not Roy! She could not conceive of Roy as being a murderer. Who was Shive Frank to say so!

But suppose Shive Frank *had* acted merely out of bitter hatred and a determination to have revenge no matter how it was accomplished, and suppose that everything he had written about Roy was utterly false, that he had set down, say, the stories of actual crimes in which he himself had participated and that he was cunning enough to know could be verified, and had speciously dragged Roy into this on paper as the chief actor—suppose all this were so, then Shive Frank from his grave might still achieve his purpose and send an innocent man to the chair!

Those papers were in a pawnbroker's safe, Schnaffner's safe. Schnaffner lived somewhere on the lower East Side. Any directory would tell her exactly where. Was there any way of getting those papers before Schnaffner returned to the city and delivered them to Phil? Was there any way of—of opening Schnaffner's safe? Or, if she couldn't do that, was there any way of getting them away from Phil before he turned them over to the police?

If she could only read them herself first, and judge for herself what weight they would carry in the eyes of the law!

Why was she so sure that Roy could not be guilty of Jonvers's murder, or any other murder? Just because he was Roy? She would have believed it impossible, thinking of Roy as she had known him, that he could have lived a life of crime extending back for over ten years now—and yet she now knew that to be true. Would he have stopped at the murder of Phil to-night? Or stopped his gangsters? Would he stop short of it to-morrow night—if the opportunity offered? In his life as a racketeer and gangster had he never shot to kill? And if it were true that Roy had killed this man Jonvers, and that what Shive Frank had written was not merely a cowardly and despicable lie—what then?

No, no! It couldn't be! She couldn't let herself believe it. And yet—and yet if it were so! What was she to do? Hadn't she the right to protect him? Wasn't it more than a right? Wasn't it a duty? Morally, she held him innocent in any case. If his loss of memory had not been cruelly exploited he would be living to-day a clean, honourable, and normal life. He was not to blame. It was not his fault. It was something over which he had had no control. He was entitled to all the protection she could give him. If she could only stand between him and trouble long enough to win him over, to get him away from his

present surroundings and environment, she had the faith to believe that his real nature would reassert itself. But could she ever hope to do that? If to-night were any criterion of what she would be obliged to do, how long could she possibly carry on? Her own position was precarious in the extreme. If it were known that it was she who had been in that house to-night, it would——

It was the cycle beginning over again.

On and on and on her brain stumbled ceaselessly.

From somewhere in the house a clock struck two.

And then suddenly she sat upright in bed. The front door was being flung violently open. There was the stamp of feet in the vestibule. Then the Big Shot's voice in harsh tones evidently calling up the stairs:

"Hey! Ma! Come down here! And the old man, too! Hop to it!"

She heard the sound of movement from above, and the next instant heard Mrs. Kane's answer from, she presumed, the head of the stairs.

"What is it? What's happened? What's the matter?" the woman shrilled anxiously.

"Matter?" the Big Shot's voice held an ugly laugh. "Hell's blown its lid off—that's what's the matter! Come on! Hurry up—both of you! I'm going out again. I only blew in to wise you up."

Footsteps, those of Mr. and Mrs. Kane undoubtedly, were hurriedly descending the stairs now; came

then a confusion of voices from the lower hall, everybody talking at once; and then suddenly the voices became indistinct. They had all gone into that front room, she thought.

Without a sound she got out of bed and stole to the door. There was a great deal that she, too, wanted to know! She cautiously opened her door a crack. Yes, that's where they were—in the front room. And she could hear quite well now, even from where she was, for, unlike the previous occasion that night, the door into the hall had been left open.

There was only one voice speaking now—the Big Shot's:

"Sure, if you'll close your yaps and give me a chance. We were after that guy Martin to put him through and find out how much he knew. Batty Rose was running it, with Skinny and a couple more of the boys and a car. But they didn't start anything until after dark. Then Batty picked Martin up in Pete Lonezzi's. Martin had Kinger with him and——"

"You mean the police lieutenant?"—this a little tremulously, and obviously from Mr. Kane.

"Yes!" The Big Shot's voice was vicious. "You look white, Pop! Get a grip on yourself! Yes, that's who I mean. Batty slid into a seat at the next table and picked up a word or two of what they were saying. Martin said that Shive Frank had spilled the beans in some sort of a written confession about some of the jobs Shive Frank and I had pulled together a

few years ago. Martin said he couldn't get at the papers for two or three days yet, but as soon as he got them he'd have the goods on me enough times over to send me to a dozen chairs."

Mrs. Kane gave a frightened cry.

"Do—do you think that's true? How much did Shive Frank really know?"

"He knew too much! How can I tell what he's spilled until I see the papers? This is just the thing he would do. The cur was too yellow to come out and fight."

"Where are the papers?" It was Mr. Kane again, still tremulously.

"How the hell do I know?" the Big Shot answered fiercely. "That's one of the things we would have made Martin tell us. *And he will yet!* We'll get him again before he has a chance to pull anything. We've *got* to get him now."

"You mean"—Mrs. Kane's voice mingled dismay and fear—"you mean he got away from the 'bird cage'? Izzy Myers said that Batty Rose had him there."

"Yes, he got away!" The Big Shot was snarling now, and Enid could hear him pacing up and down the room as he talked. "Batty trailed Martin out of Pete's, and the car trailed Batty. They got Martin with a blackjack on one of the cross streets, put him in the car, took him down to the 'bird cage,' and roped him up. The others went away and left Batty

there with him. And then some woman put one over Batty. Batty let her in because she said she had a message or something from Izzy Myers—and she held Batty up. Then Batty gave her the slip, and she thought he'd run out of the house; but, instead of that, he got through on the tapped wires to Izzy's place. Wilkie and Mullins were at Izzy's, and they gypped the first car they saw and beat it for the 'bird cage.' In the meantime the woman had found Martin and untied him, and, when Batty tried to stop them from leaving the house, Martin crept up on him in the dark and put him to sleep with a bash over the head. They got out of the house through the window just as Wilkie and Mullins went in. The boys heard them and started after them. They weren't for using their rods or making any noise about it for fear of attracting attention to the house; but Martin, the fool, started shooting, and after that it was all off. Martin and the woman pinched the car. Wilkie and Mullins let 'em have it with their guns, but the car got away. Everybody was running out on the street by that time, and Wilkie and Mullins had to beat it. And Batty came to just in time to make his getaway before the police piled into the house."

"The police!" It came in almost a scream from Mr. Kane. "Then we're done! My God, there's almost half a million dollars' worth of snow there! D'ye hear, Norry? They'll find it! There's nothing to stop them!"

"Thanks for letting me into the secret!" The Big Shot's voice was icy. "Of course they'll get it, but it won't do any good to yowl about it! I told you that hell had blown its lid off, didn't I?"

"Yes"—Mr. Kane was obviously in a frenzy of fear and excitement—"and with the police in that house, and with what you said about Shive Frank, we'd better blow, too—and do it quick while we've got a chance."

"Blow!" The Big Shot flung out a grating laugh. "Nix! Nothing doing! Blow! It's just the height of the season—and things are coming good. That snow's a nasty crack, but we'll make it up. Say, take a chair and sit down—your knees seem to be getting weak! There's nothing to connect *us* with that house; and as for that Shive Frank stuff it may be all the bunk, but, whether it is or not, we'll get that sneaking Martin cur *first*—and anyway they don't even know who the Big Shot that they're looking for is."

"I'm not so sure about that!" It was Mrs. Kane now, more composed, but with a dubious, anxious note still in her voice. "For a few years you handled things from off stage and nobody knew who the Big Shot was except a few like Izzy Myers, but lately you've been taking a hand again in too many jobs yourself. I've kept telling you it was too risky."

"Yeh? And the word was going around that the Big Shot was too high-hat to associate with the low-brows that worked for him!" The Big Shot's tones

were brusque, intolerant. "And, besides, the boys were making a mess of things. Job after job was going wrong, wasn't it? Well, forget it!"

"What did Batty say that woman looked like to-night? He saw her, didn't he?"

Enid's fingers gripped tightly at the door jamb. Mrs. Kane's question had come with startling suddenness.

"Yes, he saw her—but he didn't know who she was. He'd never seen her before. He said she looked like a freak out of a museum. Dirty face, dirty hands, spectacles, clothes like Grandma used to wear, and a hat out of the ark that flopped all over her face."

"No,"—Mrs. Kane seemed almost to be speaking to herself—"it doesn't sound like her—unless, of course, she was disguised."

"*'Her!'* Who?" The Big Shot's voice rang out sharply, imperatively. "What are you talking about? We've got to get her, too, if we turn New York inside out. Do you think you know who she is? What made you say what you did?"

"I was thinking about last night." There was a malicious sniff in Mrs. Kane's voice. "It's kind of queer about a woman butting in then, and a woman butting in again to-night. You know she isn't your sister any more than I am. I told you from the start that I was suspicious of her, and that she was up to some game."

"What!" The Big Shot was barking out his words. "You mean Enid Howard? Has *she* gone?"

"Not that I know of." Mrs. Kane's tones were sour. "You said the dear child wasn't to be disturbed. I haven't been near her room. I rather wish I had now."

"You're crazy!" The Big Shot's voice was rasping, angry. "You've got it in for her—and God help anyone you go out after! Why, the girl's too sick to leave her bed. What are you trying to do—start something?"

"I'm only telling you what flashed into my mind." Mrs. Kane's voice was still malicious. "Anyway, I certainly don't trust her."

"Hell!" exploded the Big Shot savagely. "Well, we'll soon see! I'll take a look, and——"

Silently Enid closed the door, and, running swiftly back across the room, her bare feet noiseless on the carpet, got into bed. Perhaps a minute passed, perhaps two, and then as she lay there watching the door, which she could make out quite well even in the darkness, she saw it begin to open slowly. It made no sound.

She closed her eyes then, simulating sleep. She heard someone—Roy, of course—it couldn't be anyone else—tiptoe across the room to her bedside. She sensed him bending over her. She felt his breath upon her cheek. He seemed to stand there for an interminable length of time—until it seemed that she could

no longer lie there quietly, that she must move, cry out, do something, that to breathe in a regular, natural way was beyond her power any more.

And then he tiptoed back across the room again, and the door closed softly—but it was daylight before she fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIV

Some Cards Are Faced

ENID opened the door of Martha Debbins's house, hurried along the hall, and, entering her little living room, turned on the lights. Roy had brought her here. That was his car outside. He had gone around the corner to the avenue for some cigarettes before coming in. She was thankful for the few minutes this gave her alone, not that she had left any trace of her visit here last night—for she had been as careful to put Martha's clothes away as she had been to unload her automatic before leaving the house—but there was Roy's picture in the silver frame!

Perhaps it wouldn't have made any difference, and he probably would have thought nothing of it if she had gone into her bedroom for it, saying that she always kept it on her bureau; but it was much more natural that it should be on the mantel—as it always had been until two nights ago—with those other photographs, similarly framed, of her father and mother.

She ran now into the connecting bedroom, opened her trunk, took out the photograph, and, returning with it, set it on the mantel.

And then she slumped into her desk chair.

It had been a strange day, an anxious day. And now she was a little afraid of this visit here with Roy, not overconfident that he had no ulterior motive back of it, not quite sure what the result would be.

He had come into her room that morning and asked her if she thought she would feel well enough to go over to her rooms with him that evening for the "check-up" he had spoken about the day before —or was she still too ill to get up at all? He had spoken in quite a casual manner, but she was not at all certain that what had seemed to her as almost a hurried move to put her to the proof was not inspired by the suspicions Mrs. Kane had attempted to instil in him—that, in spite of the fact she believed he had been satisfied she was sleeping peacefully when he had stolen into her room during the night, his own suspicions had not also been aroused.

She had been obliged to make a quick decision—whether to feign continued illness, or to announce cheerfully that she was so much better she was going to get up anyhow, and would be ready to go at any time. The latter, because it disarmed any thought of what might otherwise be construed as an effort to postpone or delay an ordeal that he might think she was afraid to face, seemed the safer course to take, and she had taken it.

He had asked her then if she had a telephone in her house; and had asked her, too, for Martha Deb-

bins's address in Maine. She was afraid he was not altogether so willing to accept her at face value as he had been at first. But, after all, she was on safe ground there! Why should it worry her?

He had told her not to leave her room until he came back in the evening for her—that Runty would attend to her wants. Whether he was intentionally keeping Mrs. Kane and herself apart she did not know, but she thought so. She was grateful for that. How, knowing what she did, knowing what the woman was plotting, could she have met the other? She had spoken to no one and had seen no one all day except Runty, who, besides bringing her meals, had put a fresh dressing on her head, but had substituted for the unwieldy bandage a strip of surgical plaster.

But there was something else that had made the day one of almost intolerable anxiety—an anxiety that had grown with the hours, and was still in no degree relieved. Phil was fully forewarned, and thoroughly on his guard, of course; but had they made another attack on him? If so, had it been successful? What had happened? She knew nothing. There had been no newspaper on her bedside table that morning, and, though she had asked for one, Runty had consistently "forgotten" about it all day; therefore, she did not even know how Phil in his newspaper account, which would of course be reproduced in all the other papers, had disposed of the woman who had

been seen to escape with him from that house last night. She dared not ask Roy or Runty. Neither of them had referred to the night before, and she was not supposed to know anything about it.

That, however, was relatively a minor matter. What had taken place? What moves and countermoves had been made? What had Roy done? Had Phil and the police got anywhere? Were they any nearer to the Big Shot's identity than before? Had the dragnet brought Skinny or Batty Rose to the surface? And Phil? *Was* he still safe? One thing afforded her a certain measure of relief. It was not merely a matter of getting rid of him, of shooting him down on sight as Shive Frank had been shot, for then, indeed, she would have been desperately afraid since that could be so easily accomplished. But they would not do that, dare not do it—it would defeat their own ends. Those papers in Schnaffner's safe protected Phil in that respect now. Even if they killed him they must know that those papers would sooner or later come to light. They would try first to make him tell where the papers were. Yes, but where *was* Phil?

She did not dare use the telephone. It was too risky. Roy had only gone a few steps away. He would be back at any minute now. There was not time. After he had gone she would have a chance—at least she supposed he meant to leave her here. She did not know. He had been strangely noncommittal and un-

talkative coming down in the car. "There are one or two things to settle at your place first, and then we'll talk the rest of it out," he had said.

Why hadn't she been allowed to have a newspaper to-day? Was he going to attempt to trap her or trick her into a slip of the tongue about last night?—of which, debarred of news, she could not possibly know anything unless she *was* the woman who had been at the "bird cage"? Perhaps!

The papers were full of it. That much she knew; for, on her way here with Roy, when they had been slowed in traffic for a moment opposite a news stand, she had at least seen one of the scare-heads. She could not have helped but see it. It was in great red type flung full across the page in double lines. She could see it now:

POLICE FIND DRUGS IN VACANT HOUSE

SEIZURE WORTH HALF MILLION DOLLARS

Roy had seen it, too. He had muttered savagely under his breath. Her lips trembled a little. If he only knew! She was glad, glad with all her soul that that much misery had been averted; but, too, she faltered before the significance of it all. It was only one of so many things that Roy was guilty of. He had gone so far! Even if he was not caught by the police, could

she ever hope to save him from himself? What was the end? What was——

She rose suddenly to her feet. She had left the front door ajar for him, and he was coming now.

"I am in here," she called out quietly.

He came into the room, and tossing his hat on a chair, stood looking critically around him.

"So this is where you hang out, eh?" he observed. "Not so bad!" His eyes fixed on the mantelpiece. "That the photo you were talking about?"

"Yes," she said, and, going to the mantelpiece, took it down and handed it to him.

He studied it for a moment; and then, with a nod of his head that might have meant anything, laid it on the desk.

Her heart sank as she watched him. He wasn't paying any more attention to the photograph. His eyes were roving over the paraphernalia on the desk —the typewriter, the pad of blank manuscript paper, the typed sheets of a story.

"Don't you recognize that photograph?" she asked anxiously. "Doesn't it bring back anything at all to you?"

He shook his head.

"We'll get to that in a minute," he said easily. He picked up and examined one of the finished sheets of manuscript. "Is this part of the book you told me you were writing?"

"Yes," she said again.

He put the sheet of manuscript back on its pile without comment other than another nod of his head.

"Got anything to show," he demanded abruptly, "that you were living in Winnipeg in—when did you say you left there?"

"Three months ago," she answered.

"Yes, well—anything to show that three months ago you were living in Winnipeg?"

"Any number of things," she responded quickly. "Letters from friends, papers connected with Father's death, and"—she pulled open the drawer of the desk—"here is my bank book. You'll see that it goes back a long way, and that I still have an account there."

He took the book, glanced at a few of its pages, handed it back—and suddenly reaching out to her, patted her on the shoulder.

"'Nuff said, kid!" he announced genially. "I thought you were straight from the start. But I had to be sure. I'm satisfied. All there is to do now is to knock that brother stuff out of your pretty head."

Pretty head! She did not like the way he said that. A strange sense of apprehension came over her. His hand had closed a little over her shoulder, and he had drawn her nearer to him.

"I don't see how that is possible since you *are* Roy," she said simply. "Just look at that photograph again."

"Sure! I know," he said. "I guess it looks like me—that's why I'm sure for one thing that you're hand-

ing out the straight goods. But no matter how much like me it looks, I'm telling you again it isn't me—and that's on the level, too."

"But it *is* you, Roy," she insisted.

"Nix!" he laughed. "And, say, kid, I'm tickled pink it isn't! He's the last guy on earth I'd want to be! You get that, don't you?"

He was closing his arms around her.

"Roy, what are you doing?" she cried in a startled way as she drew back from him. "What—what do you mean?"

"Aw, quit your kidding!" His voice was earnest now, the laughter gone out of it. "You know what I mean. I wouldn't want to be your *brother*. It isn't only what you did for me the other night—I fell for you from the start. I just had to make sure you weren't playing any game, because the whole thing was kind of queer. But that's the way it came—hard and quick. You're the only girl that ever got me all the way. And, listen, kid, it was the first look did it, though I was holding on tight till I knew I wasn't being played up."

She caught her breath.

"You—your feelings were—were perhaps natural," she faltered. "We are brother and sister. You—you would instinctively be drawn to me even though you did not remember me."

"Nothing like that!" he answered. "And that don't go, anyhow, seeing we *aren't* brother and sister. It's

just plain honest-to-God he-man love, Enid—and nothing but!"

She stared at him, confused and frightened. Her hands went to her temples.

"And I?" She tried to keep her voice steady. "Suppose it were true that you were not Roy, that you were a man who had been a criminal all his life—what do you imagine my feelings would be toward such a man?"

"Aw, I'm not worrying about that!" he said complacently. "A girl who pulled what you did the night before last would get used to that."

Her hands came down to her sides—and clenched.

"You are wrong!" she said passionately. "If you were not my brother who had been cruelly and abominably victimized, I should hate you and despise you for what you are and what you have done—and I would crush you if I could!"

He laughed at her in a half-amused, half-tolerant way.

"You're a little spitfire, aren't you? That's one thing I love you for. And you've got more sand and nerve than any other girl I've ever met—and that's another reason. And you are *you*—and that's the whole reason. You think you mean what you say now, but one of these days you're going to marry me just the same. I'll risk that. You're the one girl for me, and I'm going to have you!"

Her shoulders had drooped suddenly, her lips

were trembling. She had never dreamed that anything like this could happen. It was as though she had built a house of cards that lay suddenly strewn at her feet.

"You are my brother," she said miserably.

"No," he said; "and that's my first job on the way to the altar—to prove I'm *not!*"

"You can't prove what isn't true," she answered. "If you could, don't you know that I would expose you?"

"Oh, no, you wouldn't!" he returned complacently. "Don't forget that you're wanted by the police yourself. Don't forget the Girl Bandit. And that helps us to get away on an even start too, doesn't it?"

She made no answer, but as he came toward her again, his hand outstretched, she groped out behind her for the desk chair and sank into it.

"Don't touch me!" she whispered. "As my brother you would have certain privileges; but you have none while—while you have any other sort of feeling for me."

He stared at her for a moment contemplatively—and then abruptly thrust his hands into his pockets.

"I get you, kid!" His tones were those of one humouring a child. "It's kind of a jolt—being made love to by a guy that you think is your own brother. Sure, it's raw for you—I can see that. But, say, don't you worry—you won't hear another love peep out of me until I've shown you that I'm handing you the

straight goods. So it's up to me. But after that—well, you've heard me! I'm not going to lose any sleep about not getting you—some way or other. See?"

"It is quite useless to discuss that phase of it"—her voice was cool and reliant again—"because it can never exist. You are Roy Howard. You are my brother—and, as your sister, I would do anything in the world, risk anything, to save you from the life you are leading, because I know that you are not morally responsible, that you have, through your loss of memory, as I told you yesterday afternoon, been victimized and cruelly exploited. You naturally believe that you are someone else. You have been made to believe it. But you are, nevertheless, Roy Howard. There could be no *proof,* but only false testimony to the contrary."

He swung himself onto the edge of the desk, and, lighting a cigarette, grinned at her now quizzically.

"You're pretty sure of yourself, aren't you?" he inquired. "Well, so am I—of myself. But the difference is that I *know,* and you only think you do. Let's go to it. That's the one reason, outside of that little check-up that I had to put over, why I'm here. Listen! What I told you about losing my memory and coming back from the war is all true—but you believe that, too. What you don't believe is that I was born in Chicago and lived there—but that's also true. And I'll tell you how I know it. Sometimes I've had little flashes of memory come over me, queer little bits of

scenes. You get me? Police stuff! That wouldn't have been in Winnipeg, would it? Was your brother ever run in there by the police?"

She did not answer him for a moment. Her lips seemed suddenly to have become dry and parched. If—if this were true! For the first time her certainty and assurance wavered, and even the bare possibility that he was not Roy, a possibility that had never before found lodgment in her mind, left her nerveless and shaken—but only for an instant—only until she could think clearly again. These fragments of scenes out of the past were not actual but imaginary. Izzy Myers and the Kanes, in order to convince him of his past, would have had to supply him with spurious details of just such things as these. And in his condition of mind their constant repetition had finally had the inevitable effect of making him believe they were not only real, but were the evidence, perhaps, of returning memory. Why, people even in normal mental health came to believe their own fabrications if they repeated them often enough! She told him so.

"Yeh?" he said. "You don't let go easily, do you? Maybe if I let you take my finger prints and send them to Chicago you'd change your mind."

"I wish you would!" she returned quickly. "I'm sure there are none there that would have the same classification."

"Nothing doing!" he exclaimed with a short laugh. "I'm not asking for trouble. Maybe I shouldn't have

mentioned it, but I had something else in mind that's like that sort of identification in a way. It's not only people's fingers. Most people carry around on their bodies some little distinctive mark that they were either born with or else collected in the shape of scars and cuts and that sort of thing while they were kids. Do you believe that?"

"A great many people do, of course," she admitted. "But that has nothing to do with the present case. You—Roy—didn't have any."

"You mean you don't know of any," he amended coolly. "They don't always stand out a mile, and they might be so insignificant that they weren't perhaps even known to the person himself. But to his nurse, say—she ought to know, eh? How long did you say that Martha of yours was your brother's nurse?"

She passed her hands nervously across her eyes. Yes, Martha, of course—but Martha wouldn't need anything of that sort, even if it existed. She would know him instantly.

"From the time he was born," she answered mechanically. "It—it seems strange to have to tell *you* that she was with us for years and years!"

He nodded.

"I asked you for her address in Maine this morning—remember?"

"Yes," she said.

"Well, that's why!" he said. "I telegraphed her to

call you up on the long distance here between half-past eight and half-past nine to-night, and——"

The telephone was ringing.

The Big Shot laughed.

"There's your Martha now," he said. "Ask her about it!"

CHAPTER XV

By Way of Evidence

MARTHA! Martha—on the long distance! That was why he had asked for Martha's address this morning! Yes! Martha would know if he had any distinguishing mark upon his body! She, Enid, did not need any additional proof—but it would prove to *him* that he *was* Roy. But—a sudden fear came upon her—suppose there was no mark. Then it proved nothing at all. And now, far more than before, for his sake, for hers, because of this—love of his, this monstrous thing that lay between them, she was in desperate need of proof.

Her hand trembled as she swung around in the desk chair and lifted the receiver from the hook.

"Yes?" she said with an effort. "Hello! Hello!"

"Is Norry Kane there?"

She gave a sudden gasp. It was a man's voice that had answered her—a voice that she thought was Izzy Myers's, but she was not sure.

"Yes," she said. "Wait a moment." And then to the Big Shot, as she rose and surrendered her chair: "It's not Martha. It's a man who wants to speak to you."

"That's all right," he said easily. "Martha's only side-tracked, then—you'll hear from her before the hour's up. I got into a little jam last night and couldn't be found in a hurry. I learned my lesson—that's why I tipped off some of the boys to your telephone number before coming down here." He slipped into the desk chair she had vacated and, in turn, picked up the receiver. "Shoot!" he said. "Who is it?"

For a moment he sat listening without a word; then, with an abrupt injunction to hold the line, he shifted the receiver to his left hand and, reaching out over the desk, pulled the pad of blank manuscript paper toward him.

"You don't mind my using this, do you?" he asked, glancing hurriedly up at her.

She had moved to one side of the desk. She shook her head.

"No, of course not," she said mechanically.

He took a pencil from his pocket.

"Go ahead, then"—he was speaking into the transmitter again—"and slip it over in code—it'll brighten up the evening for any little Hello Miss that might be listening in! . . . What? . . . Yes, sure! Give me that, too! I'm ready! Let 'er go!"

Enid watched him with worried eyes as his pencil flew across the paper. In code! There was something premonitory in that; something that brought her added anxiety—yes, and fear. What was it now—

some new evil hatching? It must be, since they dared not use plain language over the 'phone.

From where she stood she could not see what he was writing; but she saw that the sheet was almost covered before he spoke again.

"Now hold the line," he instructed for the second time, "while I dope it out."

He set the receiver down on the desk, tore off and laid to one side the sheet of paper on which he had been writing; and, on the pad again, began obviously to decode the message. Once he whistled low under his breath; and Enid, watching him in a sort of drear fascination now, saw a pleased, and yet ominous, grin spread over his face.

At the end of a few minutes he picked up the receiver once more.

"Hello!" he said briskly. "As wide open as that, eh? It'll save a lot of trouble! So he found the whole works, did he? . . . Good! Nobody home, eh? When did you say the old boy pulled out? This evening? . . . Yes, I know about the rest of the family." He chuckled suddenly. "They've been slipping meal tickets to Florida for the last two months! . . . What did you say? Send *who?* . . . Nothing doing! He'd crab it! . . . Well, I know that, don't I? Leave it to me, I'll take his place. . . . What? . . . Yes, that's what I said! . . . Well, maybe a couple of lookouts—that's all that'll be needed. . . . What?

Something else? Isn't that enough for one night? Well, spill it!"

For perhaps a minute, then, the Big Shot sat in silence with the receiver to his ear. When he spoke again his grin had been replaced by narrowed eyes and an outthrust jaw.

"Oh, he is, is he!" he snarled. "Is *that* so! Well, maybe it'll be the last crack he makes! . . . What? . . . Stop the trucks? Not by a damned sight! Curse him, he's asking for it, and he'll get it! I'll show him who he's stacking up against! I'll be right over! Tell the boys to stick around until I get there. That code stuff can wait for an hour or two—it'll be safer to pull it then, anyhow. . . . How's that? . . . Yes, I've got my car here. Sure, I get you! You bet your life, I'll step on it!"

He slammed the receiver back on the hook and, scowling, swung away from the telephone. Then, rising to his feet, he snatched up the sheet of paper on which he had taken down the code message, crumpled it in his hand, and thrust it into the side pocket of his coat.

"I've got to go!" he flung out. "You know Twisty Morgan, don't you?"

She watched him with a strange sense of foreboding as he ripped from the pad the sheet of paper on which he had decoded the telephone message, and, after folding it, tucked it carefully away in an inside pocket.

"I know what happened the night before last," she answered.

He was suddenly clamp-jawed again.

"Yes!" he said viciously. "Well, the word's out that he's looking for a showdown to-night. You didn't know it, but he took Maloch for a ride last night—just as a starter, he called it!"

"But the paper said he was in hiding from the police," she objected. "How could he do anything?"

"Hiding!" he laughed mockingly. "That don't count! Maybe he is from the police, but the police don't draw any cards in *our* game, kid! If they get in between they get hurt—see? That's the way we play it. Any of our boys would drop Twisty cold on sight for what his crowd did to Maloch, but they wouldn't let a yip out of them to the police if they knew where he was hiding. Maloch lived just long enough to tell a couple of bulls, who were trying to fill up their notebooks, that it was Santa Claus who did it. Get me? He didn't have to worry about leaving it to the police to square things up. Understand? Sure, Twisty's in hiding from the police, but that's nothing to do with us. He won't be hiding long from *anybody* if he starts anything to-night, for then even the police will know where he is to-morrow morning, because he'll be parked on a nice cold slab in the morgue!"

"Roy!" she expostulated faintly.

His mood changed suddenly.

"Learn to say Norry!" he grinned. "You'll have

to before the night's out, and you might as well start in now. Sorry I can't stick around until Martha telephones, but I'll be back later, and by that time you'll have heard from her. She'll put you straight—you'll see! And I'll be here so's you can give me the once-over to prove it." He picked up his hat and, hurrying now, moved toward the door. "I don't know whether I'll leave you here to-night or take you back to the house," he added. "I don't know whether you're well enough to be left alone yet. We'll talk that over when I get back. And"—he was out in the hall now, and his words came banteringly—"give my best to dear old Martha!"

He was gone. The front door closed behind him. She heard the whir of his car as it started away.

She groped her way almost blindly back to the desk chair and sat down. Her brain was in riot, in chaos. It was her subconscious mind that was prompting her now. She picked up the telephone book, found the number, and called the *Herald-Star*.

After a few minutes she pushed the telephone away from her. No one there knew where Phil was, except that they said he had gone out of town somewhere for a few days on a "story."

That wasn't true, of course. She would have given anything if only it were! But, at least, he was on his guard in having that information circulated. He was obviously working under cover. That was something —no, a great deal! He was almost certainly still safe.

But there was no way of communicating with him now, unless—unless *he* telephoned. Yes, he would be sure to do that. Perhaps he had already—during the day—and had got no answer. But he would again. He was certain to keep on calling from time to time until he got her.

The silver-framed photo lying on the desk where Roy had left it attracted her attention. Mechanically she reached out for it. She swept her hand across her eyes again and again as she studied it. Somehow she could not see very clearly. There was a difference, of course—but this was the picture of a youth, and the Big Shot was over thirty. It was only the natural change that all those years would show.

The telephone rang again.

Was it Martha now, or—or perhaps Phil?

She lifted the receiver.

"Yes?" she said.

"Is the Big Shot there?"

It was a man's voice again—but not one that she even faintly recognized.

"No," she said. "He's gone."

"Where?" The voice was excited, sharp. "Do you know where he is? It's important!"

"No," she said again. "I don't know where he's gone. But he'll be back here."

"When?"

"I don't know. In two or three hours, perhaps."

"Well, then, give him a message, will you?"

"Yes," she said. "What is it?"

"Tell him to look out for Twisty Morgan to-night."

"Who's speaking?" she demanded.

"Never mind! Just tell him that. Tell him to look out for Twisty Morgan to-night. Got it?"

"Yes," she said. "I'll tell him."

"All right."

She heard the click of the receiver being hung up at the other end of the line. Twisty Morgan! That was the second warning within a few minutes. What did it mean? What was going on to-night? And what was that other thing that Roy was going to do? That code message?

What was the matter with her? Something seemed to be smothering her. Her head was swimming most curiously. Roy—*her brother*—in love with her! She laughed out suddenly, hysterically. Then, clasping her head in her hands, she crouched down over the desk, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

A bell was ringing somewhere. She raised her head and listened. The sound was insistent. Of course! It was the telephone again. She brushed the tears from her eyes, and automatically put the receiver to her ear—and then she became alert, eager, expectant, excited, herself again, her mind centred on the immediate present. It was central asking for her; and then another voice—far away:

"There's your party. Go ahead!"

Martha! Yes, it was Martha this time! This was a long-distance connection.

"Martha!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Martha! Martha! Is that you?"

And then the old familiar voice, but in anxious tones, answered her:

"Yes, dear! Yes, it's Martha. I received your telegram. Is anything the matter? What is it? Are you ill? Has something happened? I've been so worried all day, but your telegram said not to telephone you until this evening. Tell me, dear, what is it?"

It would do no good to tell Martha that *she* hadn't sent the telegram—it was inconsequential, anyhow. And it would mean so many explanations, explanations that she dared not make over the telephone.

"Martha," she cried, "I've seen Roy!"

A startled, incredulous ejaculation came over the wire.

"Roy!" The anxiety in Martha's voice had deepened. "Child, what are you talking about? You must be ill."

"No, I'm not ill," Enid answered a little wildly. "I've seen him—talked to him. He's here in New York."

"Oh, Miss Enid!" Martha's voice was quivering with excitement now. "Dear Roy—dear, dear Roy! It sounds like a miracle! But your poor mother was always so sure, sweet soul, that he would come back,

wasn't she? Oh, Miss Enid, what glad, glad news! I wish I could take you in my arms this minute, child. I am so happy for you both. What a meeting you must have had! Is he well? Where has he been all these years? Something very strange must have happened to have kept him from you until now. Tell me about it."

"Yes"—there was a sob in her throat now—"yes, something did happen—something terrible. Martha, he—he lost his memory in the war. He doesn't recognize me. And, worse still, he believes that he is someone else."

For a moment, as though stunned into silence, Martha did not answer; and then Enid heard her cry out in mingled grief and pity:

"Poor Roy! Oh, Miss Enid!"

"And I've tried to tell him over and over again," said Enid brokenly, "that he is Roy; and I've tried to prove it to him, and make him believe. But he won't believe."

"Child"—Martha's voice was suddenly resolute and determined—"I'm coming right back home! With someone else besides yourself, with his old nurse to recognize him too, he'll soon believe us. Don't you worry another moment about it, dear. I'll leave here to-morrow morning."

"No"—Enid shook her head piteously as though Martha could actually see her—"that wouldn't do

any good. He says he knows who he is, that he was born in Chicago, and that he could bring dozens of people to identify him who knew him there."

Again there was a pause.

"Miss Enid"—Martha's voice came at last hesitantly and troubled—"I—I don't seem to be able to quite understand. It—it's so strange. Could—could there be any chance, dear, that you have made a mistake, and that he is someone else?"

"Oh, Martha! How could I? How could that be possible?"

"Well, I haven't seen him, dear, and there *are* people, you know, who look very much alike. There have been hundreds of cases of mistaken identity."

"Mistaken identity!" Enid's voice was low and trembling. "Yes, that is what he says. But it can't be! It couldn't be!" And then, falteringly: "Oh, Martha, do *you* think it could?"

"Well, of course, as I said, I haven't seen him," Martha answered soothingly; "but such a thing *is* possible. And then there are all these years that have gone by since he went away, and there is the war, too, to think of—there must be changes. He was little more than a boy then, and he's a man now."

"Oh, I know all that!" Enid cried out desperately. "That is also what he says. And—and that I was only a child when I last saw him. But if you saw him now you'd know, too, that he was Roy."

"Yes, and that's just what I am going to do," Mar-

tha replied cheerfully. "I'll be back there as fast as a train will take me."

Enid's lips tightened suddenly. Martha back here! She had not seemed to grasp just what it would mean when Martha had spoken of it a moment ago. Martha here—now! Roy—the Big Shot! No, no, no—she mustn't come! And, besides, it wouldn't do any good!

"No, Martha"—she was forcing a composure into her voice—"I do not want you to do that. Indeed, you mustn't do anything of the kind! I should feel very badly if you did, and it couldn't possibly do any good—even if you were just as sure as I am, and told him so over and over again. He wouldn't believe us. There are too many people who tell him he is someone else. But there *is* a way, Martha, in which you can perhaps help. Oh, I hope you can, anyway. It would be such absolute proof. Listen, Martha, you were his nurse from the time he was born, and you will know. Was there any mark, any distinguishing mark, a birthmark, so many people have them, you know"—her voice was pleading, eager now—"even the tiniest little thing on his body?"

Martha's answer came without an instant's hesitation:

"No, Miss Enid, there wasn't. Nary a thing! There wasn't a blemish on the blessed lamb."

"But—but perhaps," urged Enid, "there might be a scar of some kind, even if ever so small a one—a

cut or something, that he might have got when he was a little kiddie?"

"No," Martha answered, "I never knew of one. Of course he had lots of bumps and bruises and scratches, but nothing that ever left any lasting mark."

"You're sure?" Enid moistened her lips. "Oh, Martha, are you sure? Think, Martha—think! Any little abnormality—*anything?* It—it means so much."

"Yes, Miss Enid, I'm quite sure. As a child Roy never had anything of that kind that would identify him now."

She fought back the tears.

"All right," she faltered. "Thank—thank you, Martha."

"Listen, Miss Enid"—Martha was speaking earnestly—"don't you really want me to go to you? I wouldn't mind in the least, dear, you know."

Enid struggled to speak quietly. "I know you wouldn't, but, as I've told you, it couldn't possibly do any good. If anything happens, or if I need you, I'll let you know at once." She swayed a little in her chair. Martha's children! She must ask after them. She had been very selfish, and Martha had been so good. "How are the children, Martha? I do hope they are well."

"Oh, yes, Miss Enid, thank you! It's been really wonderful for them down here."

Enid closed her eyes for an instant. She could not talk any more.

"I'm so glad!" she said. "Give them my love, Martha. Good-night!"

She hung up the receiver blindly.

Nothing! It had amounted to nothing! She dropped down in her chair, and with wet eyes stared in front of her.

It had not been her idea, it had been Roy's; but from the moment she had realized its possibilities, she had counted so much upon it—so much, indeed, that she had been sure it would supply irrefutable proof that he was Roy. She had thought, not as he thought—that he would convince her—but that she would convince him. And it had amounted to nothing. Nothing had come of it. They were where they were before.

What was she to do now? He was so sure. It was queer—what he had said about those broken flashes of memory that recalled the Chicago days. If that were so, if it were really so, then he *wasn't* Roy. But she had explained all that quite logically to herself. Or had she? Suppose—suppose he was not Roy? What would it mean? To what would it lead? What would she do? Would she be glad—or sorry?

What was the matter with her? Where had this suggestion of doubt come from? She had never had doubt even occur to her before. It was absurd now. He was Roy. She was just a little——

Her eyes had lost their introspective stare and had suddenly widened. She realized that she was gazing at the pad of blank manuscript paper. It was very strange! There seemed to be markings on it. Like—like words!

CHAPTER XVI

The Code Message

SHE leaned forward, picked up the pad of paper, and a sharp, excited cry escaped her as she scanned the top sheet more closely. There *were* words here—not very distinct, some of them quite undecipherable to the naked eye—but unmistakably words.

Her heart began to beat furiously. Roy had crumpled up and carried away with him the sheet on which he had taken down the code message; he had also taken away with him the second sheet on which he had written the translation—but on the next sheet, this sheet that she was now looking at, there showed the pressure marks, a great many of them at least, of his pencil when he had set down the translation!

She took up a pencil, and swiftly, but with extreme care, traced over the words and groups of letters that were legible. The result, of course, did not make sense—it was just a lot of fragmentary writing strewn all over the sheet.

Yes—naturally! She had not expected anything else. But she was not through yet! She opened the drawer of her desk and, her lips quivering in sudden

reminiscence, took out her reading glass. The last time she had used it had been the night she had got that snapshot of Roy from Shive Frank. It seemed as though everything went back to Shive Frank. Even this pad of paper here in front of her! Roy would never have been in this room, would never have written anything here, if it had not been indirectly due to Shive Frank! That was two nights ago. This was the third night. The phrase repeated itself in her mind. Was there any significance in the fact that this was the third night? It had begun in so—so premonitory a way with things she scarcely dared to contemplate. Roy's love! Suppose she could never make him believe he was her brother? Suppose he wasn't? She had seen him once in tigerish mood. Where was Phil? Would the two meet? Which would have the upper hand? One of them must go down—oh, God, perhaps both of them! Was what Shive Frank had written true? Was there evidence in that paper in Schnaffner's safe to send Roy to the chair? Was Roy —a murderer? No! A thousand times no! It could not be! Her mind was in riot again. Premonitory? What had she meant by the night beginning in a premonitory way? What more did she expect would happen? Oh, yes, this paper!

What was on this paper?

She mustn't let her mind race that way—she would lose her reason. What was on this paper?

Would the reading glass help any? She passed it

rapidly up and down over the sheet. Yes, of course it would! Where she had left blanks before, she could quite easily make out wholly or partially formed letters now. She began to work. This wasn't so easy—it took longer. She wondered what the original code had been like. From what she had seen as she had watched him, Roy had seemed to be setting down long lines of connected letters and figures. What did it matter? He had broken them up into words here as he had decoded the message.

At the end of perhaps ten minutes she set aside the reading glass. There still remained a few blanks here and there, but the missing letters were so obvious that they supplied themselves. She filled them in—and sat for a moment strangely quiet and white of face as she read the completed text:

"P. J. Murkman. Wall safe. Library. Second floor. Panel behind books, top left large bookcase. Press lower edge. One right, then 19. Two left, then 32. One right, then 27. Throw to lock. Basement window areaway."

There was no question as to what it meant. It was brutally plain—cruelly clear. They were going to rob somebody's wall safe—no, *Roy* was! Roy had said over the 'phone that he would take it on himself—with a couple of lookouts. She remembered, too, what else he had said—that there was "nobody home" there to-night.

She hunched her shoulders together, shivering, as

though with physical cold. That was the combination of the wall safe, of course, staring her there in the face. She knew that much about safes, anyhow, for she had opened her father's safe for him many times. What was in the safe? What did it matter exactly what was in the safe? It was something valuable, extremely valuable undoubtedly, or Roy—these men of Roy's—would not be after it. And with nothing, with no one to stand in their way, they—no, not "they," *Roy*—Roy could steal whatever was there so easily.

That inner voice, so often her mentor, thrust at her now rapierlike.

"Did you say 'no one'? What are *you* going to do about it?"

"I don't know!" she said aloud miserably. "I don't know!"

"If you sit down here and permit the theft, and do nothing to prevent it, though you know all about it, you are as guilty as anyone else," stated the voice uncompromisingly. "You would be an accomplice."

"But I can't warn anybody in the house," she whispered wildly, "because there isn't anybody there; and, even if there were, the warning would be passed on to the police—and I can't let the police know. They—they would catch Roy!"

"So, therefore, that quite justifies you in allowing the safe to be robbed!" said the voice coldly. "And, of course, it quite clears your conscience as well!"

She pressed her hand to her head. Her wound had suddenly begun to throb so! Perhaps she had taken the bandage off too soon. With her blood pounding so strangely it might start bleeding again. But Runty had said this evening that a dressing held in place with surgeon's plaster was all she needed now. What was it that voice had said?

"Oh, what shall I do!" the words came suddenly, stumblingly, piteously from her lips. "I know there is only one way. But—but to-night I am afraid."

"So it would seem!" observed the voice stingingly.

She sat very still while the shadows gathered in her eyes. The voice didn't say anything more. It was so quiet in the room that she could hear the ticking of her wrist watch. It seemed to grow louder. There was something remorseless about it. It was ticking the seconds away.

"Ticking the seconds away!" She found herself repeating the words under her breath. "Ticking the seconds away!"

Why was she doing that—repeating those words? Did they possess any particular significance?

This was the *third* night! She looked around her suddenly in a startled way. What had brought that thought again? Was there anything significant about that, either?

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know!" she cried out despairingly. "But to-night I am afraid. I am afraid. I am afraid."

The wrist watch ticked on, remorselessly.

She half closed her eyes for a moment—and then, straightening up in her chair, she reached across the desk for the telephone directory.

Murkman. P. J. Murkman. She found the address. It was in a very fashionable locality. A rich man's house! Of course, it was a rich man's house! Wall safes weren't ordinarily anywhere else.

If Roy found an *empty* safe as well as an empty house!

There wasn't any other way to prevent the crime and still protect Roy. She would have to go. She would have to "rob" the safe before Roy got there. She would have to do it now, at once—and to-morrow, or the next day, or at the first opportunity she could find, Mr. Murkman would have its contents restored to him without knowing where they had come from or who had sent them.

"There isn't any other way," she said in a monotone. "I will do it."

Her head was up now, her shoulders resolutely straight. And now, with her decision made, she stood there motionless while a minute passed, facing with tight-drawn brows the problem she had set herself.

She would go, of course, in the makeshift disguise she had assumed last night. It was far safer in every way—to go as Enid Howard, in her proper person, was to court disaster. Later on, when Roy went to the house, he would find that someone had been there

before him, and that the safe was empty. She could imagine his fury. He would use every resource he had in an effort to discover who it had been. He would turn his gangsters into sleuth hounds. If they discovered that a woman had been seen in the neighbourhood who answered to the description Batty Rose had given of the woman in the "bird cage" it would tally with last night, and she would be safe, for she felt that she had nothing more now to fear on that score. But if by any mischance she were seen, say, entering or emerging from that areaway, and the description was that of a young woman who even faintly resembled Enid Howard, then her danger would be very real. Mrs. Kane would snatch at the chance to re-voice her suspicions—and this time the Big Shot might not be so easily satisfied. True, though it had been in code, she, Enid, had been in the room when Roy had received the message, and—why argue it? There was no question as to which was the safer way.

Of course, it would delay her a little—the time it would take to dress. But time now was not the vital factor. Roy had said he would not go to the house for an hour or two. He had gone somewhere else first because something had cropped up about Twisty Morgan. Twisty Morgan! It was queer about that second telephone message, that warning! What did it——

She checked herself. She mustn't let her mind go

off at a tangent. She needed all her wits now and all the concentration she possessed for the task she had in hand.

What was likely to be in the wall safe? It was no matter whether it would be bonds, or jewels, or money—but would it be bulky? Would she need something to carry it in? She shook her head. No; it was not likely. Wall safes as a rule were not very large themselves. She did not want to be hampered with anything—not even her handbag. There were big pockets in Martha's coat, and what they would not hold she would manage some way.

Her automatic? Yes! One never knew! She took it from her handbag and loaded it quickly.

Was there anything else? She remembered last night. She would need a light—she would not dare turn on any of the house lights. But not matches! A flash light! But she had no flash light. Well, she would get one, then, in a store somewhere on the way across town.

Was that all? She nodded affirmatively to herself. All except the translation of the code message, of course—the location of the wall safe, the combination of the safe itself. But she would commit all that to memory while she was changing her clothes, and then destroy it.

No, there was nothing else that she could think of; nothing else that she could foresee and guard against; nothing else that she could anticipate and so minimize

the risk she ran—and, taking the sheet of paper bearing the decoded message, she started up the stairs to Martha's bedroom.

But, as she went, suddenly she shook her head uneasily. *It was the third night.* She could not get that thought out of her mind. Was it childish superstition? If so, she was ashamed of it. It meant nothing. But it recurred persistently. It was the third night.

"Oh, Roy!" she whispered brokenly. "Roy! You *are* Roy, aren't you?"

She reached the bedroom, switched on the light, and began to change her clothes. She was on edge, jumpy. She knew that. But she was going through—all the way. She smiled a little grimly into the mirror. If Martha could see her now! Was it any wonder she had told Martha not to think of coming back?

It did not take her long now; she did not have to search for anything to-night—and a few minutes later, in the nondescript character of the woman of the night before, she left the house.

CHAPTER XVII

The Wall Safe

THE areaway, Enid discovered, separated the Murkman mansion from a towering apartment house.

It was very narrow—so narrow that the only justification she could think of for its existence was that it might perhaps furnish light and air to the rooms of the larger building. Thanks to the telephone directory, she had found Murkman's house easily. It was, as she had thought, just a little west of Park Avenue, and she was quite sure no one had seen her when, a moment ago, she had stepped into the areaway from the street.

Now she moved silently along it searching for the basement window. It was very dark. She was glad of that. Certainly no one passing by on the street could see her now. Here and there above her were lighted windows in the apartment house, but they did not dispel the lower shadows—and the Murkman house naturally was in blackness.

Those lighted windows! She halted suddenly and looked up at them. Suppose someone were watching from one of those windows! Her lips tightened. Yes, she was afraid—afraid of everything to-night! She

had been afraid when she had left Martha Debbins's house, and more afraid the moment she had entered this areaway. There had seemed to be something irrevocable about doing that—as though it were then too late to turn back. Turn back! She shook her head. At least, she knew she would never do that! Was it cowardly to be afraid if one still went on?

Those windows! Yes, she must be careful. Most of them had their blinds down, but there were some that hadn't. She stood for a full minute scanning these latter intently. There was no one at any of the windows.

She went on again, hugging close up against the wall of the Murkman mansion, but, so far as she could make out in the gloom, it was not until she was near the extreme end of the areaway that she came upon the basement window she was looking for—and then only to find herself peering down at it in sudden dismay. It was quite accessible because its sill was practically on a level with the areaway—but it was protected by an iron grill!

Perhaps this wasn't the only basement window—perhaps there was another. She went on down the full length of the house. There was no other window. She came back and stood staring helplessly at the iron grill. There wasn't any mistake—at least, she had not made any. That was what the code message said: "Basement window areaway." And this was the only one there was—one with an iron grill!

Under the flopped brim of her hat she passed her hand nervously across her forehead. Roy probably knew this, or would be told of it, and would come provided with the necessary appliances for removing it. But what was *she* to do?

Mechanically she bent down to examine the grill more closely—and, as she touched it, she drew her breath in sharply. It was loose; and not only loose, but now, as she put a little pressure upon it, it came away readily in her nand.

She smiled at herself thinly. Of course! She was stupid! This had all been "fixed" long ago. They had obviously only been waiting for the opportune moment to strike—when all the occupants of the house were away. And someone, the one whose departure they were waiting for, probably Mr. Murkman himself, had gone away that evening.

She lifted the grill just enough to one side to free the window, and tried the window itself. It opened inward—easily. Nor did it make any sound. Well-oiled hinges, of course! Whoever had prepared the way had left nothing undone! A vague wonder came to her. Knowing the location and combination of the wall safe, and with the means of entry into the house already provided for, it seemed strange that the safe itself should still have been left untouched merely because the house had not been entirely unoccupied until now. Surely it could have been looted without a sleeping household, say, being any the wiser for it!

Such things had been done often enough. Why not here? There must be a very good reason for it, of course, but she did not know what it was. She probably never would know. She could not ask Roy!

She was down on her hands and knees now, working herself in feet first through the window, but her eyes were constantly scanning the lighted windows of the apartment house. It was not quite so easy as it had appeared to be. The basement window was oblong in shape, and, though amply long enough, was hardly two feet in height. She could scarcely squeeze through—as it was, Martha's hat, with its preposterous brim, caught on the casement and was nearly pulled from her head.

Her feet, just as she was about to let go and drop, touched the basement floor below. She stood up. The window sill was just a little above her shoulders. She reached out and, as well as she could, pulled the grill back on the sill. It did not fit perfectly by any means, but certainly no one chancing in the areaway would notice that it was out of place. Then she closed the window.

It was inky black in here—almost as black as it had been in the "bird cage" last night. But to-night she had come provided against that; and now the flash light which she had purchased on her way across town sent its round white ray inquisitively about her. She was in a cellar, of course—cement-floored. And,

what alone concerned her, directly in front of her were the stairs leading to the floor above.

She mounted these rapidly, and emerged into what the flash light enabled her to see was a sort of pantry. Here there were several doors. She opened the one that obviously gave on the front portion of the house, and, stepping forward, found herself in the rear of what was manifestly the main hallway.

And now she stood still for an instant, listening. There was no sound. There was such an utter absence of sound that the silence was oppressive and heavy. She bit suddenly at her lips. Of course there was no sound! What was she listening for? What did she expect to hear? There wasn't anybody in the house—that was why, an hour from now, Roy was coming here.

She went on again, the white ray lancing the darkness, pointing the way. It was a big hall, a big house. There were beautiful rugs on the floor. The doors of the room opening into the hall were closed. Such details she absorbed unconsciously—but she was not concerned with her immediate surroundings. The library was on the second floor, the floor above.

Her first steps, as she began to mount the main stairway, startled her, for the silence in the house was suddenly broken. There was no carpet on the stairs. The stairs were bare, polished wood. Her footsteps clattered. Instinctively she began to tiptoe. But that was stupid—absurd! She bit at her lips

again in vexation. Were her own footsteps going to send her into a panic? People out on the street couldn't hear the occupants of the house every time the latter went up and down the stairs, could they? Well, then?

She ascended the remaining stairs in a natural manner—but the beam of light that played ahead of her wavered a little, and was not quite so steady as before.

Disquiet had come upon her more strongly than ever. She tried to tell herself reassuringly that there wasn't anything to fear; that the worst of it was over, now that she had got safely into the house; and that it wouldn't take much longer—just the few minutes needed to open the wall safe—and then she would be out of the house again. A tremulous little smile came. Yes, she knew all that, but it did not alter the fact that she was desperately afraid just the same.

Where was the library? Her flash light's ray was darting up and down the hallway of the second floor now. The doors here, too, were closed. She opened one door after another. None of them was fastened—the keys, she noticed, had all been left in the locks on the inside. And then, finally, after an instant's pause on the threshold, she entered a room at the rear of the hallway.

This was it.

Her flash light swept around the interior. It was a

large room, richly furnished. The walls were in dark, panelled wood. Opposite the door what was obviously a window recess was hidden by heavy velvet portières closely drawn. A magnificent oriental rug covered the floor, deep, leather-cushioned armchairs were everywhere. There were a number of bookcases; but one, the one at the front end of the room, extended from wall to wall. There was no mistaking it. The code message had specified the "large" bookcase.

"Panel behind books, top, left," she whispered to herself.

"Top," of course, meant the upper shelf; and "left" would naturally be to one's left-hand side as one entered the room, which in this case was the side nearer the door as opposed to the window.

She stepped quickly over to the bookcase. She could just comfortably reach the top shelf, and, working with one hand while the other held the flash light, she began to pull down the books and lay them on the floor.

The wall behind came into view. She was breathing with little quick-drawn inhalations now. Excitement for the moment was overriding every other emotion. Yes, she could see the panelling now—the entire width of one panel in fact, for she had removed enough books for that—but it seemed to be perfectly solid.

"Press lower edge"—she was repeating under her

breath the instructions contained in the code translation.

That meant on a line with the shelf, of course—it couldn't mean anything else. She ran her hand accordingly across the width of the panel, pressing upon it firmly. There was a faint click, and, much like the lid of a jack-in-the-box, a section of the panel sprang out from the wall.

She was tense now, breathing more rapidly than ever, keyed up to the highest pitch. Here was the wall safe, its nickel knob and dial glistening under the flash light's ray!

But she would have to stand on tiptoe now, and reach in beyond the shelf in order to work the combination. That would be awkward unless she could steady herself a little with one hand. But the flash light! She would have to see, of course. Yes, she had it! That was easily fixed! She reached for another book, laid it flat down on the shelf and propped the flash light against it. Yes, that was just right! She forced a queer little smile. Much better, in fact! It didn't *waver* at all now.

And now the combination!

"One right, then nineteen"—her lips were forming the words breathlessly, soundlessly. "One right." The dial spun with a musical little tinkle. "Now to nineteen." No—she had gone past it. Her fingers were trembling. She would have to begin over again.

"One right, then——"

She whirled, suddenly startled, away from the safe. Her elbow struck the flash light. The flash light fell on the floor rug with a dull thud.

She seemed to have stopped breathing. What was it? Imagination? Frayed nerves? She thought she had heard a sound like—like the faint creak of a boot sole perhaps, as though someone in the room had suddenly shifted position; but it had been so low and indistinct that she could not be sure of it.

A second passed. Certainly there was no sound now except the thunderous beating of her own heart, nothing except the——

Her eyes widened and grew dark with fear. It seemed as though every drop of blood in her veins had become suddenly frozen. *Someone was here!* The flash light had not gone out when it had fallen, and its beam, flooding along the floor, was now focussed on the lower edge of the velvet portières that hung in front of the window recess—and just slightly protruding from under one of the portières was the toe of a man's shoe!

She was caught! Quick! Had she any wits at all? Was there any way out? Her brain was racing. Suppose it were Roy, suppose it were someone else, no matter who it was, she could not save the contents of the safe now—but could she save herself? Whoever was there had not seen her—that is, to recognize her, or even to tell, probably, whether she were a man

or a woman. She had always been *behind* the ray of light.

A fraction of a second gone! *Quick!* Yes, there was a way—or at least a chance. It was only a few steps to the door, and there was a key on the inside of the lock. Whoever was behind the portières might wonder for a few seconds why she was not working again on the combination of the safe—but those few seconds would be all she needed.

Muttering purposely, hoarsely, as though enraged at her own carelessness, she stooped, picked up the flash light, and propped it against the book again on the shelf—its ray once more full upon the nickel dial of the safe.

And then, in a flash, she turned, and, her steps soundless on the thick rug, darted for the door. She reached it, and, feeling for the key, removed it from the lock. But it made a little noise—a little grating, metallic sound. That was what she had been afraid of. And it had been heard. There was a shout, the swish of the portières being wrenched violently apart —but she was outside the door now, and the key was in the lock on the *outside* too.

She slammed the door shut, turned the key in the lock, and, racing through the darkness, went down the stairs. Behind her she heard the rip and rend of wood, the crashing of a door panel.

Should she try to get out by the front door? It would be quicker. No! She shook her head as she ran.

Even if she were able to open it, which was unlikely, she might be seen going down the front steps.

She gained the cellar, found her way to the window, opened it, and, reaching out, pushed the iron grill to one side; then, clutching at the sill with her fingers, she began to pull herself up by the arms. It was not easy—not nearly so easy to get out as it had been to get in. And it was taking time! There was nothing to stand on—she regretted bitterly now that she had not thought of that when she had come in. But it was too late for regrets. There was no time to look for anything now; and, besides, she no longer had her flash light.

Panting, breathless, she managed finally to get her elbows on the sill. She was all right now, she told herself. It would only take a moment more. She wriggled forward, got her hands outside on the cement-paved areaway, and, preparing to crawl through the narrow window, gave a low cry of fear.

Someone was shouting. She had been seen! The shouts were coming from one of those lighted windows in the apartment house. She could see that the window was open, and that a man was standing there. She couldn't go back—that was only to be trapped. In desperate haste she thrust head and shoulders through the window—and, as it had done when she had gone in, the wide brim of her hat caught on the window casing. But this time, with both hands outside the window, she could not save it, and it toppled

backward into the cellar. Return for it? Hunt for it in the darkness? The struggle to get out again! There wouldn't be time to get out again! There wasn't time to go back. There wasn't time perhaps even to save herself.

Another window in the apartment house was flung open—still another. Came a chorus of shouts now!

But now she was on her feet out in the areaway, and running madly for the street.

And then luck turned for her open-handed. She caught a taxi that was just cruising by, and the next minute she was being whirled out of sight around the corner.

CHAPTER XVIII

Uncovered!

THE eight-day clock in Martha Debbins's parlour was striking ten as Enid reached the house and, running up the stairs, entered her old nurse's bedroom and hurriedly began to change back into her own clothes.

Ten o'clock! It must have been nearly nine at least when she had started out for the Murkman mansion. She had not been gone, then, much more than an hour at most—but, even so, if it *had* been Roy who had been concealed behind those portières, he might be back at any moment now. He had said he was coming back for her, hadn't he? Yes, but suppose he had been trapped in that room—that *she* had trapped him? The alarm had been raised. Suppose that he had been caught there?

She cried out a little—sharply—as she tore off her clothes. Her thoughts would not let her alone. From the moment she had got into the taxi her thoughts had driven her nearly frantic. They were driving her frantic again now.

No, he wouldn't have been caught—not Roy! It

would have taken more than a locked door to do that. And, besides, she had heard the door panel being smashed even before she had been seen at the basement window. Once the panel was broken he would only have to reach through and unlock the door. She had not thought of taking the key out of the lock. She was glad now that she hadn't. Roy would have had time to get out of the house somehow—by a lower window in the rear—somehow—long before the police answered the call that was sure to be sent in from the people in the apartment house. And, moreover, they would hardly be looking for anyone else since the thief—they had doubtless classified her as a thief—had *already escaped.* No! If it was Roy who had been there he was too clever—she swallowed hard—too *criminally* clever to be caught as easily as that!

But why should she think it was Roy at all? She had not seen him any more than he had seen her. Why was she so convinced, for she was convinced in her own mind, that the man behind the portières had been Roy? Who else could it have been? It was logically Roy. It all fitted together perfectly that way. Roy had gone somewhere first on account of something that had to do with Twisty Morgan. It had not taken him as long, perhaps, as he had expected. He had gone, then, to the Murkman house, arriving, say, just a few minutes before she had. He had probably just entered the library when—she re-

membered the clatter she had made—he had heard her footsteps on the stairs, and he had done the one obvious and natural thing—concealed himself behind the portières. Yes, it had been Roy!

But it *might* have been someone else. Yes—she was putting on her own clothes now—it *might* have been; but why worry about that? Whether it was Roy or some other thief, it had turned out better than she had thought it possible when she had run from the room. True, she had had a very narrow escape herself; but, due to the very fact that she had been seen and an alarm had been raised, she had, after all, saved the contents of Mr. Murkman's safe. The library window, she knew, was on the side of the house facing the apartment, and whoever had been there in the library could not have helped but hear the shouting. Fortunately, as it turned out, she had not got the safe open; and whoever was there, Roy or another, would be too much concerned with his own escape then, and in getting the door of the room rather than that of any safe open!

What was she trying to do—make herself believe what she wanted to believe? All this was very plausible, and was very probably true—but she didn't know it to be so. No; but it brought a certain amount of relief, allayed a little her anxiety, to feel that the night had turned out this way.

There were so many things! So many angles to it all! If it had *not* been Roy, for instance, and he had

gone there later, was there now, would he——? No! Here she was on sure ground. It would be just like last night. The news would have spread like wildfire that the Murkman mansion had been broken into. The curious would still be there. Obviously, he would know that the game was up and would be warned away.

She was dressed now, and was scrubbing the grime from her face and hands. Her hat! Yes, that had been serious—almost the most serious thing of all. Not the hat itself—the police would be a long time in tracing Martha Debbins's old hat! But the fugitive was certain to be known as a woman without a hat. Those in the windows of the apartment house who had seen her running out of the areaway would know that and report it. The taxi driver knew, of course, that he had driven a woman from that exact spot, and that his fare had had no hat. As soon as he learned that the police were looking for such a person he would at once tell his story.

But now, for the first time, a faint smile crossed Enid's lips. She felt quite sure she would never be traced through any information the taxi driver could give. She had alighted from the taxi in front of a house on the next street, and had nonchalantly—at least she hoped she had given the impression of being nonchalant about it—mounted the steps and had pretended to ring the bell. The ruse had been neither original nor particularly subtle—but it had appar-

ently succeeded. The taxi had driven away—and she had descended the steps. After that, by means of the vacant lot whose existence had been so forcibly impressed upon her the night she had been followed by Shive Frank, she had, without being obliged to show herself on either of the avenues, gained her own street and house. She did not think that she had been seen by anyone. She had kept carefully in the shadows, and had even used the shelter of doorways and stoops to avoid the few pedestrians that were on the streets.

She nodded her head emphatically. She was quite sure that she had got safely away—and she was particularly grateful for one thing. She had thought of that almost from the moment her hat had fallen from her head—the fact that Runty had substituted a piece of plaster for the bandage. The additional description of a bandaged head would not perhaps have helped the police any—but it would have spelled disaster and the end for her. A woman with a bandaged head would have been vitally significant—to *Roy!*

Or even the description of a woman with a *wounded* head! Yes, but no one had seen that strip of plaster. The taxi driver hadn't. She had been most careful about that. He, of course, had been at the wheel on the left-hand side of the cab, and she had purposely seated herself at the right-hand side for the very simple reason that the wound was on that side too. He couldn't possibly have seen it—even when she got in or out, for she had been just as care-

ful then to keep that side of her head out of view. And besides it wasn't as though it had been broad daylight. Certainly, in the gloom of the areaway, the strip of plaster on her head could not have been seen from the apartment-house windows even if it had been three or four times the size it was, whereas, as a matter of fact, it was quite small and inconspicuous and her hair covered most of it.

She was quite ready now, completely changed—except for her own hat. Should she put that on? She hesitated. Roy might be back at any moment, or, on the other hand, it might be hours before he came. And then, too, she did not know whether she was to stay here or go back to the house on Fifty-first Street. He had said he would talk that over when he got back. No, she wouldn't put on her hat.

She extinguished the lights, went downstairs, switched on the light in her little living room, and sat down at the desk. There was nothing to do now but wait for Roy—and think. If she could only stop thinking for a little while! But the perils were so many, and the road ahead was so hard to see! Even the question of whether she was to remain here or go back to Roy's house was one that was full of tormenting anxiety. There was the necessity of keeping contact with Roy—and from the moment she was no longer an inmate of Roy's house there was the element of personal danger to herself at the hands of Mrs. Kane and Izzy Myers.

She had not minimized that danger, but so far it had not been crucial. They would strike the first chance they got—she knew that. Not to-night, she felt satisfied of that, even if she did not go back to Roy's, for, if those warnings about Twisty Morgan meant anything, Izzy Myers would not be concerned with her for the moment. But to-morrow, or the next day—yes! How was she to protect herself? What was she to do? She did not know. They were afraid of her, and they meant to put her out of the way—she was not deceived on that score. They were afraid of her influence over Roy, and, in view of that sudden and, to her, terrifying declaration of love he had made to-night, they were in a measure justified in their fears; but *she* had begun to be desperately afraid that no influence of hers would turn him from the life he was leading, and to be still more afraid that she would never be able to make him believe he was Roy Howard and not Norry Kane. But they did not realize that! What safety could there be for her —except in flight? She shook her head. If the Big Shot, Roy, were not her brother, the whole aspect would be changed; but even so there would still be Phil, and——

Would she be glad or sorry if Roy were *not* Roy? She had asked herself that question before, hadn't she? How strange that she should ask it again! How could there be room for such a question? There

weren't any doubts, were there, creeping insidiously into her mind? Even if Martha had been disappointing that hadn't changed anything. He was still as much Roy as he had been before. What was it? There must be something! Of course, he was Roy—but there must be something!

The door bell startled her.

There he was now! She was quite safe, he could not possibly know anything, she had argued that all out with herself—but there came a sudden stab of fear as she rose hastily to her feet and started for the door. He would be in an ugly mood, of course; but he could have no reason to suspect *her*. She had only to keep her wits about her, and surely she could do that.

The bell rang again before she reached the door—rang impatiently, viciously almost, it seemed. Certainly, and from his standpoint with good reason, he was in no docile or pleasant humour!

She opened the door—and the next instant drew back with a low, startled cry, as she stared at the figure standing there on the stoop. It wasn't Roy; it was Phil.

"You—Phil!" she gasped. "I—I told you never to come here."

"Yes—so you did! But I *am* here!"

There was something strangely harsh about his voice. He was stepping forward over the threshold

now—but now she blocked the way. Of all nights, not to-night! Roy was coming back to-night! Roy might be here at any minute.

"No, no!" she protested anxiously. "I—I can't let you in! Oh, I warned you never—never to come here!"

And then, before she had scarcely realized what he was doing, he had pushed her almost roughly away from the door, and had stepped into the hall.

His voice came harshly again, as he closed the door behind him:

"You go along there into that lighted room I see down the hall! I'll talk to you in there!"

"Phil!" she cried out wildly. "What does this mean? Why do you speak to me like that?"

"Go on into that room!" he repeated.

She obeyed him mechanically. She found her way to the desk and leaned against it—for suddenly her knees felt strangely weak. What did this mean? He was standing there on the threshold now—unbuttoning his coat. His face was haggard, ashen.

And then from under his coat he took out an object that, crumpled as it was, she could not mistake, and the sight of which, she knew, left her own face bloodless too.

"Here's your hat!" he said hoarsely.

He flung it toward her. It struck the typewriter and fell to the floor on the far side of the desk.

She did not move. It did not seem as though she

had the power to move—or the power to speak. It seemed as though she had never seen so white a face as his.

"Why don't you speak?" he demanded almost incoherently. "Why don't you say something?"

Say something? Yes, she supposed she should say something. Her brain in a stunned way seemed capable of understanding that. But what was there to say? He knew it was her hat. He had not only seen her wearing it with the rest of her disguise last night, but had even commented on it. Her hands, as she leaned with her back against it, gripped at the desk to keep herself erect. It was the end for her—that was all! But she could not grasp it fully. This should have been Roy—not Phil. Her mind groped blindly through a mental fog.

"How—how did you get it?" she asked faintly.

"Is that all you have to say?" He laughed at her bitterly. "You know very well how I got it, don't you? I found it in the cellar of the Murkman house—beneath the basement window!" He came a step toward her. "Last night you asked me how I was going to explain the presence of the 'mysterious woman' in my story. Do you know what I wrote? Did you read the papers?"

She shook her head.

"I'll tell you, then! I said it was a woman who must have been one of the gang—but, oh, my God, I didn't know I was telling the *truth!*" He was rock-

ing on his feet, his words pouring from him in a shaking voice. "A thief! A criminal! *You!* I said she helped me to escape because she had probably taken pity on me; and that then she gave me the slip. Oh, yes, I protected you! I—I loved you. I thought you were an honest woman! And now! No wonder you did not want me to come here!"

She was scarcely conscious of what he said. She did not understand. Her mind seemed suddenly to centre on one thing only. She must get him away from here. Suppose Roy came! She was caught. It didn't matter what happened to her now. Arrest? Well, they could not make her talk! But she must get Phil away from here.

"Please, please go!" she cried out imploringly. "You mustn't stay here! I—I am not trying to—to escape. I will go with you."

"Where?" he flung out.

"Anywhere," she said brokenly. "I—I do not know. To—to the police, I suppose, from what you have said."

"The police!" He laughed raucously. "Why do you think I had that hat hidden under my coat?"

"I do not know," she answered helplessly.

"Because"—he was close to her now, and suddenly his hands closed fiercely on her arms—"because I have not forgotten that you saved my life last night—and because, God help me, I still love you! Do you understand? Enid, do you understand?—I love you!

And I do not know what to do! I have already compounded a felony in hiding that hat."

She closed her eyes. When she looked again he had thrown himself into the desk chair, and his head was buried in his arms outflung across the desk. Love came, all the tenderness of it, all the grief of it, all the hopelessness of it. She laid her hand timidly upon his shoulder.

"I do not know how you came to be at—there to-night," she whispered; "but would it help any, could you believe me, if I told you I—I am not—not a thief, or—or a criminal? But, *please,* anyway, do not let us stay here!"

He looked up at her, ignoring her pleading to leave the house—as though, indeed, he had never heard it. There was torment in his eyes.

"If any man had told me this about you," he said in strangled tones, "I think I should have killed him. But I was there in that house to-night myself. It was I who was behind that portière in the library. A police officer and I, and we were waiting—but I never thought we had baited the trap for *you.* Why do you talk about being believed? Why do you make it worse by a lie? I *know!* I know that unless you were one of the gang, yes, and one of the Big Shot's gang, you could never have known anything about Murkman's house, or his wall safe, or have been there to-night—for it was I who set and baited the trap."

She stared at him wildly. In the face of what he

was saying, all else, Roy, everything, was for the moment swept from her mind.

"You!" Her throat was dry and parched; she could scarcely speak. "A trap! I—I do not understand."

There were beads of moisture on his forehead, agony in his face. He flirted the beads away with a jerky sweep of his hand.

"You've a right to know," he said huskily. "I want you to know. You've *got* to know. And I, heaven help me, have got to make up my mind what to do! But the whole world has crashed. Since I found that hat in the cellar, and recognized it as the one you wore last night, I think I have been mad. And it was you I used to talk to in the Gondola about the Big Shot! What a hellish joke—on me! What a——"

"Don't!" she cried out piteously. "Oh, don't! Don't!"

"No!" His hands, on the desk now, were tightly clenched. "You're right! I've got to hang onto myself. I'll make it as short as I can. I heard Skinny and Batty Rose talking in that house last night when they thought I was unconscious on the floor. I told you that. I told you that they talked about some jobs the gang was going to pull. They talked about Murkman's wall safe for one thing—that it was juicy picking—that it was Murkman's habit to keep a considerable sum in cash always on hand and, besides that, securities, Mrs. Murkman's jewels, and that sort of thing. I heard enough to know that Mr. Murk-

man's valet was the 'inside' man—and something about the basement window having been fixed for a long time. Skinny, who was to do the job, was getting impatient about it. The family was away, but he had to wait until Mr. Murkman was away, too, before he could blow the safe."

"Oh!" The exclamation came involuntarily, under her breath. She had wondered about that. To *blow* the safe! That would make a noise. That explained why they had waited. They hadn't had the combination, then, all the time!

He looked at her curiously, strangely, as though waiting for her to speak—then he shrugged his shoulders.

"I did not hear all this in the way I am telling it," he went on. "I only caught fragments of it from Skinny. What I am telling you is the result of piecing those fragments together—plus the missing fragments that I got to-day. After I left you last night I went and looked at that basement window and saw that, as Skinny had said, it had been 'fixed.' Then I went to my friend Police Lieutenant Kinger. This morning Kinger and I interviewed Murkman in his office downtown. It was arranged that Murkman, taking Hettin—that's his man's name—with him as he usually did when he went away on trips, should leave New York this evening; but, meanwhile, that he should go up to his own house for lunch as he sometimes did—for Hettin frequently looked after

him in that respect also—and, while there, 'plant' the combination of the safe among some papers in one of the drawers of his desk. This Murkman did, but he said nothing to Hettin at that time about going away. Then, during the early afternoon, he telephoned Hettin to pack both their bags and meet him at train time at the station, stating that he had received an urgent summons to join Mrs. Murkman. He also told Hettin to bring him some papers from the drawer of his desk in the library—papers that Hettin wouldn't find without unearthing the combination of the safe, which latter had the appearance of having got mixed up with the contents of the drawer, and of having been completely forgotten by Mr. Murkman. We didn't know whether Hettin would fall for the combination 'plant' or not—and in one sense it did not matter. Our object was to get quick action. We didn't know who Skinny was, and we had been unable to find out anything about him; but we were sure that, after last night, he would have run to cover. If he was the only man they had who could crack a safe the job might be delayed; whereas, with nothing to do but *open* the safe, any one of the gang could take Skinny's place—and there probably would be no time lost in someone's doing so. We knew that Hettin in any case would communicate with his go-between and the Big Shot's gang to advise them of Mr. Murkman's and his own departure, and he was given every opportunity to do so. Hettin,

however, did fall for the combination. And we had made it so easy that we got the woman of the gang." He turned away his head. "We got *you!*"

She passed her hand across her eyes. It was hard to concentrate on what he was saying, for the thought, the fear that Roy might come at any minute, was dominant again in her mind.

"Oh, you—we mustn't stay here!" she cried out frantically. "We must go at once—oh, at once!"

He shook his head.

"I'm not through." There was a numb, flat note in his voice. "And, besides, we haven't decided where we are to go. Mr. Murkman and Hettin left as scheduled. Nothing was done to alarm Hettin. He wasn't to be arrested until the job was 'pulled.' We had Hettin safe enough at any time. We wanted as many of the gang as we could get—it would narrow down eventually to the Big Shot himself. As soon as Murkman and Hettin left, Kinger and I entered the house—prepared to wait several hours, or several days, as the case might be. When we heard you coming up the stairs we hid behind the portières in the library. We couldn't see who you were, of course—and just how you discovered we were there I don't know, though it's not material at the moment, but you tricked us all right. After we broke the door open I was the first downstairs to the basement window by which we knew you had entered. I had a flash light. I saw your hat—and I put it under my coat.

Kinger knew it was a woman, because the people in the apartment house told him so; but *I* knew it was *you*. As soon as I could get away from Kinger I came here." He rose suddenly to his feet, the muscles of his face twitching, and one hand closed in an iron grip upon her shoulders. "Oh, God!" he cried out passionately. *"What is the Big Shot to you?"*

"Please, *please,* come away!" she pleaded.

"What's that on the side of your head?" he demanded irrelevantly, abruptly. "It looks like a surgical dressing."

"It's nothing! Come away!" she entreated wildly. "Come away!"

"You're not very good at explanations, are you?" He smiled queerly. "You weren't last night! I don't suppose you can explain, either, why you are so anxious to get away from here, can you?"

Explain! He would *stay* if he knew! And then——

"No," she answered; "but——" Her heart seemed to stand still. It was too late! There was Roy now! She heard his car stop. She looked desperately around her. He was on the stoop now. And now the door bell rang, and simultaneously, impatiently, the door handle was turned. The door wasn't locked, she remembered. Phil had shut it. It wasn't locked. It was being opened now. The connecting room—her bedroom—it was the only chance! She was dragging at Phil's arm, pulling him frantically toward the bedroom door. And, perhaps because he was taken by

surprise, he made no resistance. She pushed him inside.

"Don't make a sound!" she whispered tensely. "Whatever you hear, if you care anything for your life—or mine—don't say a word, or make a sound!"

She closed the door softly—and had just time to stand away from it as the Big Shot appeared from the hallway without.

CHAPTER XIX

The Showdown

THE next instant Roy came storming into the room, his eyes hard and narrowed, his face flushed, his jaw muscles twitching. She had expected him to be in an ugly mood, but this was an uglier one than she had ever seen him in before. Perhaps it was *her* salvation! He would not notice her own agitation, unless—unless he had found out something about her, traced her in some way. But that was impossible! It hadn't been Roy here who had been behind the portières, it had been Phil.

"Why, Roy, how impatient you are!" she exclaimed—and wondered if she were speaking naturally. "I was just going to open the door. What is the matter? What has happened? You look as though you were terribly angry about something. What is it?"

He stared at her for a moment, his face working; and then he broke into a laugh like that of a man whose reason had fled.

"What *is* it?" he echoed, his voice thick with passion. "It's hell bust loose again to-night! That's all! It's that damned woman again!"

Relief came. He had no suspicion, then, so far as she was concerned. And there was no reason why he should go near that bedroom door! But she must keep her head, and in the rôle she was playing there was only one obvious thing to say now.

"What woman?" she inquired innocently.

Again he stared at her—and again he laughed in the same way.

"No—that's right!" he jerked out. "I forgot you didn't know about her. It's someone butting in—putting things on the rocks! Damned queer! Disguised like a freak—a hat as big as an umbrella, spectacles, crazy clothes. That's all we know about her. We were going to put over a little job to-night and, curse her, she nosed in ahead of us—but she nearly got caught by the police herself. She was seen climbing out of the window. She beat it in a taxi." He began to pace savagely up and down the room; but now, in a sort of furious self-communion, he was talking to himself: "What's her game? Who is she? Where did she come from? Where did she get the inside dope? Who's been squealing? Five hundred thousand wiped out last night, the 'bird cage' in the junk pile, and that squirt Martin let loose! By God, I'd kill her—yes, with these two hands"—he shook his clenched hands in the air—"if I could find her!"

Instinctively she shrank farther away from him. He didn't look like Roy now! His face, in its fury, was almost inhuman. It wasn't a subject that she

cared to hear him dwell on further, if there was any way of preventing it. He was getting worse and worse. He terrified her. He was like a wild beast there now pacing up and down in its cage.

"Roy, listen!" she said quickly. "After you went out, a man telephoned you. I don't know who he was. He wouldn't give me his name. He wanted to know where you were, and when I said I did not know, but that you were coming back here, he told me to tell you to look out for Twisty Morgan to-night—and then he repeated it. He seemed to be very much excited."

But the Big Shot's mind was obviously not to be diverted.

"To hell with Twisty Morgan!" he snarled. "It's this masquerading skirt I'm after! Twisty's shot some talk around about to-night, and he's got some of the boys believing him, and they're up in the air. They think they've been handed dead straight tips from the inside. Bunk! That's the way Twisty worked it. He's a hot-air artist! He hasn't got the guts to pull anything big. I'm not worrying about him. If he tries anything he'll get filled up with lead. That's fixed! He's a joke! This damned cat isn't! She's got——"

He stopped abruptly in mid-stride, staring at something on the floor—and then, the purple surging into his face, he stooped down to pick it up.

White with sudden fear, Enid watched him. Yes,

she knew what it was! She remembered now. *The hat!* She had forgotten it! It had fallen on the far side of the desk after it had struck the typewriter, and, out of sight there, it had been forgotten. There had been so much else to fill her mind; and Roy had come into the house so suddenly. He must have passed it two or three times without noticing it as he had paced up and down—but he had it now. He was coming around the desk toward her with it in his hand. He hadn't even glanced at her. What a strange look on his face! It was mottled with fury, and yet he was *smiling*. She shivered. The smile terrified her more than anything else. There was something horrible about it. He had shut the door leading out into the hall now. She saw him lock it and put the key in his pocket. And then he came and stood in front of her—still smiling.

"So it's *you*, little sweetheart—or is it my sweet little *sister!*" There was a jeer creeping through the deadly menace in his voice. "So Ma Kane was right, and you played me for a sucker! This is so much like the hat Batty Rose described—you know Batty, don't you?—that I couldn't possibly make myself believe it was any other! *Could you?* And girls don't usually have this sort of hat kicking around to-day, do they? And so, you little double-crossing snitch, it's *you!* Oh, don't be frightened—not yet! You'll have plenty of time for that! Yes, and plenty of reason for it, too! Did you hear me say a few minutes ago that I'd kill

the woman with my two hands if I found her? Is that what is making you look so white? Well, I've found her, and I always keep my promise—but there's no hurry about it. That would be too easy for you—there's a lot to come before that." He clapped the hat suddenly upon her head. "How well it becomes you! You look so sweet in it that I'd like to see you with the rest of your finery on! I suppose the spectacles and the other stuff is in there"—he jerked his head in the direction of the bedroom door. "It's too bad you forgot to put your hat away with the other things, isn't it? Come on"—he moved toward the bedroom door—"you'll dress up for me, won't you?"

It had seemed while she had listened to him that all the strength had been drained out of her body, that she was incapable of either movement or speech; but now, as he started for the bedroom door, her stunned senses were suddenly revived, and she sprang in front of him, barring the way.

"No, no!" she cried out sharply. "It's not in there! There's nothing in there!"

He swung the flat of his hand with a resounding, vicious slap across her mouth.

"Don't lie to me!" he snarled. "And that's only a taste of what you're going to get! I'll make you wish you'd never been born before I'm through with you!"

She reeled back from the blow, her hand to her smarting lips. Roy—her brother! Something within her, soul deep, cried out a denial. He wasn't her

brother! Roy wouldn't have done this! Her brother could never have turned into the beast this man was now showing himself to be! And in that moment she prayed to God that he *was not* Roy, and that she might somehow come to know it beyond question or refutation before——

The bedroom door was open!

She gave a sudden terrified cry. Phil was standing there on the threshold! Her brain, racing, told her that of course he must have heard the blow when the Big Shot had struck her a second ago. She looked wildly from one to the other. The Big Shot stood motionless as though rooted to the spot, fury and amazement struggling for the mastery in his working face—and Phil was ominously quiet, his gray eyes now all steel.

For an instant no one stirred and no one spoke; and it seemed to Enid that the very world itself had been uprooted and was whirling to destruction because these two men had met!

It was the Big Shot who spoke.

"Phil Martin!" His voice had a queer, croaking sound. "God! Phil Martin—the great newspaper ferret of New York! Going to nose out the Big Shot, were you? Well, you have! And this is what's back of all the little game, is it? Using this dirty she-Judas to get the goods on me, were you? She saved you last night, but——"

"So *you're* the Big Shot!" Phil had moved a step

forward. He laughed coldly. "I'd never seen you before, you know. This is my lucky night! I've looked for you for a long while! Enid"—his voice sharpened suddenly—"get out of here!"

But her eyes were on the Big Shot now. That swift motion of his hand toward the holster at his belt! Mad with fear, she flung herself between them, and with both hands clung desperately to the Big Shot's arm so that he might not draw the weapon.

He struck her violently in the face with his free hand, struck her again with a blow that half blinded and half stunned her, a blow that sent her to the floor, and for a moment her senses reeled.

She saw Phil spring, she saw his fist crash into the Big Shot's face. She was conscious of that in a dazed way; conscious that the two men were locked in each other's arms and were swaying around the room—but her head was swimming giddily and she felt faint and nauseated.

And then suddenly her brain cleared. She saw the two men lurch toward the desk as though they had lost their balance and were falling—and Phil was undermost. She saw his head strike the corner of the desk. She heard the Big Shot's laugh as Phil crashed to the floor and lay there in a sprawled and inert heap. She saw the Big Shot bend down and feel over Phil's clothing, obviously in search of weapons.

She got unsteadily upon her feet. He was coming toward her now. She did not know what he meant to

do. He wasn't a man any more—he was *all* beast now. His face was horrid to look upon. It was livid with fury, and it trickled blood where Phil had struck him. He had mad eyes—and they flamed with passion. And this was the man for whom she had risked everything! But that was over now! She and Phil, unconscious there on the floor, were both at his mercy. But, oh, pray God, pray God, he was not Roy! To know that—for she had only loathing for him now!—to know that Roy, her *brother,* was dead, and not this monster here, would make the end, whatever it might be, easier to bear!

"I'd put a bullet in him now"—he was panting from his exertions, gasping for breath, his words coming hoarsely—"I'd send him to join that other pal of yours, Shive Frank, right now, only I want him for something first! Do you understand? I said your other pal—Shive Frank—that, now I come to think of it, they shot at *this* corner. Funny that, eh? *This corner!* How did that happen? It's open and shut now that you must have been playing around with Shive Frank, too. The three of you! Well, Shive's gone—and all I'm sorry for is that somebody else did it! See? He's gone! And if that newspaper peacock there on the floor makes any trouble when he's through taking the count, I'll take a chance on what I wanted him for, and he'll go out here in this room. Yes—and you, too! I'm not sure it's any good keeping *you* waiting, anyhow, except that maybe by

putting the screws on you it would help to make him *talk*. Yes, and besides, of course"—his hand had shot out suddenly and closed around her throat—"Ma Kane would sure be sore if she didn't have a ringside seat!"

She fought him with all her might, battering at his face with her fists, twisting, writhing in an effort to free herself. But he was too strong. The grip on her throat grew cruelly tighter. A strangling sensation came—and then suddenly she found herself being hurled halfway back across the room. She caught at the desk to support herself, and to keep herself from falling over Phil, who lay now at her feet.

"I'd have thrown you farther," he rasped; "only I want you to pull that monkey face out of the road! D'ye hear! Get at it! He's in the way, there. I want to use that desk chair—so's I can watch you both. Go on! Drag him! Drag him over to the wall beside the door!" He was advancing menacingly toward her again. "Yes, and be damned quick about it, too, or you won't get off with any little love pats this time! I'll teach you to *crawl* before I'm through with you!"

She stooped down and, struggling to obey him, got her hands under the unconscious man's shoulders.

"Oh, God—you *beast!*" she moaned.

He laughed at her.

It took all her strength. There was a small couch against the wall; but, though she managed to get Phil that far, she could not, she knew, lift him onto

it—and the Big Shot probably would not have let her, anyway. But there was a cushion on the couch. She snatched at it, defiant of what the Big Shot might say or do, and placed it under Phil's head.

But the Big Shot only laughed again.

"That's right," he jeered; "give him all the comforts of home! He'll need 'em!"

She sat down on the couch.

What was he going to do now? What was the end of this? Was there any escape? There would be no mercy—of that she was sure; for, Roy or not, it was only too plain that he was a *killer* when aroused, and perhaps a more remorseless one than either the Kane woman or Izzy Myers! It was only because it was vital to him to find out where those "memoirs" of Shive Frank's were that he was giving them even this momentary respite!

Something was trickling down her cheek—not a tear. She had no tears. Emotionally she seemed to be strangely cold and numbed. She found a handkerchief and wiped the blood away. Beside her on the floor Phil stirred.

She looked at the Big Shot. He sat in the desk chair, which he had swung halfway around, facing her. He had laid his revolver on the edge of the desk within instant reach of his hand, and now he was calling some number on the telephone. But while he waited for his number she could see that his eyes

were narrowing on Phil. She looked at Phil again. He was lifting his head groggily.

"Just keep as quiet as you can, my poor fellow," advised the Big Shot with mock solicitude. "I'm putting in an emergency call for an ambulance for you now—and the results might be very serious if you overexerted yourself in any way! I'd never forgive myself if——" He broke off abruptly and began to speak over the 'phone: "That you, Izzy? . . . Yes, Norry. You know where I am, don't you? . . . All right! Come over here at once with a closed car, and bring a couple of the boys with you. . . . What? . . . I leave that to you—any two you like. The front door isn't locked—you can walk right in. Jump to it!"

He hung up the receiver.

Enid's lips were dry. She touched them with the tip of her tongue.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"You heard me!" the Big Shot flung back with a snarl. "I've sent for the ambulance—and I guess there'll be room for you in it too! Mr. Martin seems to be recovering slightly—but I hope for his sake he won't try to overtax his strength!"

She glanced at Phil. He had raised himself on one elbow now and, rubbing his free hand back and forth across his forehead, was staring in a dazed way at the Big Shot.

Her eyes reverted to the Big Shot. He had picked up the silver-framed photograph from the desk, and

was glowering at it—the purple beginning to mottle his face again.

"My sister!" he roared out suddenly. "I'll *sister* you! And you there, Martin! You thought you were clever, didn't you? Well, so you were—I'll hand that much to you for working up the 'brother and sister' dodge! And you nearly got away with it! I thought she was straight and that she really believed I was her long-lost Roy. She was to get next to me, find out all I was doing, eh?—and when you got something on me that was big enough to put me through all the way and clean up the boys that travelled with me too, you'd spring the trap! And you were pretty slick with what you planted on me, weren't you?" He hurled the framed photograph suddenly at Phil. "Where the hell did you get that picture?"

It missed its mark, struck the edge of the couch, and, with shattered glass, dropped face up on the floor.

"Enid!" It came in a choked, throaty cry from Phil —he was suddenly sitting bolt upright, the daze had gone out of his eyes, and he was staring at the picture, staring at the Big Shot. "Enid!" he cried again. "I heard a lot while I was in that room, enough so that I knew, thank God, that I had misjudged you —but a lot, too, that I did not understand. I begin to see now. You—you thought—or you—you think this man is your missing brother that you told me about?"

"Yes," she said under her breath.

"Cut it out!" The Big Shot's voice came in a furious bellow. "You can't get any bum play-acting like that across the footlights! That 'save the heroine' stuff don't go—because it won't save her! Do you think you can chuck that kind of dust in my eyes? Do you think you can make a damned fool of me? *I'll* tell you where you got that picture! It's a trick picture—a smart-Aleck newspaper stunt! I've got your game down pat now—and your cards aren't high enough! You found out some way that I had lost my memory in the war. You enlarged a picture you'd got of me somewhere—any photographer could stick the face on a uniform. And then along comes 'sister' to lead 'brother' gently by the hand to the electric chair! Damn you! Damn you, both of you! Two nights ago she blew in on the scene and got herself known as the Girl Bandit. That was the 'come on' stunt to get herself solid with 'brother'—it wasn't a big enough job to put him away with. I took her into my house. My God! That was what you both wanted. She must have heard things. She faked a lot of sickness over a wound that wasn't worrying her any. Last night she saved you, you yellow-sheet ape—and put that place of ours out of business, and the police pinched a half million of coke from us. And to-night —I haven't got the rights of that yet because I haven't been able to get all the dope on it—she queered another little job of ours that——"

"You were Roy—my brother," Enid found herself speaking involuntarily; "I—I couldn't let you be caught. I—I couldn't let the safe be robbed. I tried to do it myself so—so that I could send what was in it all back afterward."

"Yeh? Ain't she the little white-robed angel of light!" mocked the Big Shot. "And still trying to put the 'brother' stuff over!"

"I've—I've changed—a little," she said unsteadily. "I've come to hope with all my soul that you're not Roy."

"Yeh?" he mocked again. "You're good! You'd be better in front of the footlights than he would! Ycu know damned well, you know as well as I do, that I'm not your brother. But you had me believing until that hat showed up to-night that you honest-to-God thought I was. I fell for it. I thought I was good, too —and that this Martha woman, whoever she was, one of your stage hands I see now, would prove I wasn't your blasted Roy, and prove it hard enough so's even you would be satisfied. That was a cinch! She'd know all right! You might even know yourself, though, according to the bunk you handed out, you were a baby when your fake brother was quite a big boy, so I thought I was making it sure fire by getting Martha's say-so on it, and that——" He reached suddenly for his revolver.

Enid, startled, turned toward Phil. He had drawn

himself into a more upright position, and, set-jawed, the steel was back in the gray eyes again.

Came then the Big Shot's voice in an ugly monotone:

"If you try anything I'll blow *her* block off first! Understand?"

There was no answer, save that with a shrug of his shoulders Phil leaned back against the couch.

Enid's eyes were on the figure in the desk chair again. For a moment he toyed with the revolver, then he laid it down once more on the edge of the desk—and a sardonic grin spread itself over his features.

"Martha telephoned you, didn't she?" he inquired.

"Yes," Enid answered.

"Yeh! And, of course, there not being any Roy at all and she standing in with you, there was only one thing she could say. The two of you would sure fix that. You're going to tell me, aren't you, that she said there was nothing about Roy, no mark, nothing on his body to identify him, aren't you?"

What was he saying? Some prescient thing was dawning within her—an overwhelming thing.

"Yes," she said faintly.

"Listen"—there was a sinister chuckle in his voice now—"did you ever hear of a person being born with a web toe?"

She nodded her head affirmatively; somehow she could not speak.

"Well, I've got one!" He burst into violent, evil

laughter. "I'd fallen for you all the way, and I thought you were the straight goods when I fixed it for Martha to telephone. There wasn't a chance in a million that your Roy would have one too, and no chance at all that it would be the same one—and that would settle it! Maybe you'd like to see it? The joke's on me—but I can take a joke!" He ripped off his shoe and sock with one hand, while the fingers of his other hand closed warningly again around the butt of his revolver. "Take a look!" he invited.

She was on her feet. *He wasn't Roy!* The membrane between the first and second toes extended well beyond the second joint. Martha indubitably would have known that. She, Enid, would almost certainly have known it, too. It was proof—absolute, irrefutable, positive! He wasn't Roy! Oh, thank God! Thank God! He wasn't Roy!

She was swaying a little on her feet, tears were filling her eyes, her hands were tightly clasped across her bosom.

"You've proved it!" Her words came in little more than a broken whisper. "Yes, you've proved it! And I'm glad, glad, glad—glad that Roy is over there—under the ground—glad that the Roy I loved is dead, rather than that he should be you!"

"Go on, help yourself!" He leered at her savagely. "That's your only play! Keep on pulling it if you like—but it won't get you anywhere! It won't wipe out what you did to us last night, or the boast of that

mouthy pal of yours there on the floor who was telling the world he was going to ride me to the chair. You mangy pair of sewer rats! You——" He stopped abruptly.

Enid had heard it, too—the sound of footsteps on the front stoop. She stole a glance at Phil—and, though it was forced through tightened lips, was answered with a heartening smile. Her eyes went back to the Big Shot. He had risen from his chair; and now, his revolver menacing both Phil and herself, one foot still stockingless, he crossed the room, unlocked the door, and flung it open.

"Here you are, boys!" he called gruffly. "Come on in here!"

And then Enid, watching tensely, saw two men she did not know step into the room and, following them, Izzy Myers—but Izzy Myers, with a queer squeaking cry of rage and surprise, had halted before he had barely crossed the threshold.

"Phil Martin!" he squeaked. "Gawd!"

"*And* Sister!" added the Big Shot with a coarse laugh. "But I forgot—you'd never seen her. Meet her now, Izzy—sometimes she dresses up the way she did for Batty Rose last night!"

"Gawd!" Izzy Myers's voice was a husky whisper now. He was rubbing his hands unctuously together, his tongue was circling his bearded lips greedily. Then, catching sight of the Big Shot's bare foot, he gave a strangled gulp. "Wot the hell!" he muttered.

"That's all right!" said the Big Shot curtly. "I'll wise you up about it later." And then, as the telephone rang: "Answer that, Izzy, while I get my shoe on. And you two help *Mister* Martin to stand up—he doesn't feel very well!"

Enid's eyes, in a helpless, involuntary way, went around the room. The two men had jerked Phil unceremoniously to his feet and had shoved him back against the wall; the Big Shot had flung himself into the desk chair again and was pulling on his sock and shoe. Izzy Myers had picked up the telephone and was speaking.

"Hello!" he said. ". . . No, it's Izzy talking. . . . Yes, he's here. Go on, spill it! I'll tell him!"

There was a long silence while Izzy listened, then he turned to the Big Shot.

"It's Wilkie," he said. "He says he telephoned here once before to-night. He says he's got the low-down slipped to him by some friends of ours that Twisty's going to do us cold to-night. He says he's dead sure Twisty's got something up his sleeve, and wants to know if you don't think he'd better call the trucks off?"

The Big Shot, from lacing his shoe, looked up contemptuously.

"Tell him to forget it!" he snapped. "We know all about it! Twisty's trying to make a monkey of us by getting us to quit cold—and then giving us the laugh. That's all he's got the nerve to do, anyhow.

Ask Wilkie what he's worrying about. The trucks will be double-manned, just to make sure, and word of that will get back to Twisty fast enough. Tell him to go to it, that we're running to-night—and be damned to Twisty!"

Izzy Myers repeated the message and hung up the receiver.

"What are you going to do with these two?" he demanded.

"You and the boys are going to take them up to the Old Homestead," the Big Shot answered tersely.

"But the trucks'll be there!" Izzy Myers's crooked shoulders attempted expostulation; he wagged his head dubiously.

"What's that got to do with it?" rasped the Big Shot. "They'll be there long before the trucks—and a long, long time afterward! It may take a little while for this newspaper snipe to remember where some papers are that we want to know about, and this place isn't exactly convenient."

"I get you!" said Izzy Myers with a sudden oath. "Sure, I see!"

"All right!" said the Big Shot crisply. "You and the boys take them up in your car. I'll follow you. I'm going first for Ma Kane. I've a hunch she'll want to be in on this—on account of *Sister!*"

Izzy Myers was rubbing his hands together again. His face was revolting as it wrinkled up in a sort of unholy mirth. Enid turned her head away.

"I'll say she will!" Izzy Myers chuckled hideously.

"All right!" said the Big Shot again. "There are two ways of going out of this house." He had swung around in his chair, Enid saw, and was addressing himself directly to Phil now. "You two can walk out the way you are, or you can be carried out bound and gagged. It's up to you! If you choose the former and make an attempt to escape, or attract attention, *she'll* get a bullet through her to begin with; and if, after that, there's any chance of our being caught, you'll get yours—for then it would be all up anyway! What do you say?"

"I don't know what you mean," Phil answered coldly.

"You don't have to know—not now!" snarled the Big Shot. "But you heard what I said. Which way will you go?"

But before Phil could answer, Enid stepped toward the door.

"We'll—we'll go the way we are," she said.

CHAPTER XX

The House on the Lonely Road

IT HAD been a long ride—more than an hour as nearly as Enid could judge. And they must have covered a great many miles, for the car had travelled at an almost perilous speed. She had no idea where they were, except of course that they were out in the country and that for the last few minutes she believed they were running over a lonely and little-used road—certainly it was rough and uneven, and the headlights had disclosed no sign of a house anywhere.

She did not know where they were, or where or what the "Old Homestead," as the Big Shot had called it, was, and to which they were presumably going. She only knew that with each minute this ride became more full of haunting terror and suspense. Once she had tried to speak to Phil, but Izzy Myers had roughly ordered her to hold her tongue. Occasionally, when a stray gleam of light had found its way into the car from a street lamp, she had seen that the gangster sitting beside Phil held a revolver in his hand. She knew that Izzy Myers held one too, for

he had prodded her with it when he had told her to hold her tongue.

They were being taken for a ride!

That gangland phrase in all its bald, stark meaning had been living with her almost from the moment she had stepped into the car—was living with her now. It was like the last ride of the condemned —on the way to execution—and the horror of it had seized upon her. And they would not even let her talk to Phil. There had been moments when she had so very nearly lost her self-control; moments when she had so very nearly broken down. To bring shame upon Phil and herself for her cowardice! To invite the sneers and taunts and ribald laughter of such scum as these! That was all that had saved her. Her pride. The pride that she prayed would still keep her head high at the last.

She knew no illusions. She knew there would be no mercy. She knew what gangland "justice" was. She knew that murder was the way these men earned their daily bread. There was no chance—none—unless they, Phil and herself, could in some way make their escape. Escape! Her brain ached with the fruitless effort to devise some means of escape. It was hopeless here in the car; it was impossible—except escape by way of a bullet! But at the end of the journey? She clung desperately to that—it was all there was to cling to. If she let go of that she would let go of herself. When they got out of the car something might

happen, there might be a chance then—here there was none. What *could* happen? She did not know. They were being taken for a ride! She knew what that meant. It meant that this pitiful hope to which she clung was sheer madness, didn't it? They, Phil and she, had not even been blindfolded—Izzy Myers was as sure of the end as that! True, the car had turned and twisted and taken so many different roads that she had lost all sense of direction and locality, and she believed Phil had also, but Izzy Myers and his gangsters did not seem at all concerned as to how much or how little their prisoners knew in that respect. She understood why. It was a matter that was ultimately of no consequence whatever. They were being taken for a ride! What was Phil thinking?

Her thoughts became chaotic. The Big Shot wasn't Roy. . . . That would have been horrible now. . . . Would Martha ever know? . . . What would Martha do when she returned and found that there was no one there any more? . . . It didn't seem even now that this was real. . . . It couldn't be real. . . . She had been so happy at Martha's. . . . It had been so quiet and homelike. . . . And she had thought that perhaps by working very hard she might some day make a little name for herself with her pen. . . . That was what she had come for—to study, to gather material, and work . . . and, instead, this was the result. . . . A ride! . . . That dread phrase again! . . . If she——

The car swerved suddenly, turned into what seemed to be a sort of driveway, or lane, bordered with trees, and almost immediately the headlights picked up the outline of a house—a long, rambling house, like a farmhouse it looked as, the car swinging now, the headlights described an arc and swept their rays along the length of the building.

The car stopped.

Izzy Myers was prodding at her viciously with the muzzle of his revolver.

"Get out!" he ordered harshly.

She felt her way to the ground. It was very dark. The lights of the car had been switched off, and there were no lights showing in any of the windows of the house. She looked around her, striving to accommodate her eyes to the darkness. The two gangsters were taking Phil from the car—and, from the scuffling sounds and the snarled oaths which accompanied their commands, were obviously performing their office none too gently. She stood still, obedient to Izzy Myers's restraining grip upon her arm and the muzzle of his revolver which was now dug into the small of her back.

She could see a little more clearly now. They were standing close to the front porch, and now the door of the house was being opened.

"Who's there?" a man's voice demanded sharply from the dark interior.

"I guess you know, don't you?" Izzy Myers grunted in reply.

"Oh—you, Izzy!" exclaimed the voice in a tone of relief. "Well, I had to be sure! You're early, ain't you? The trucks won't be along for another hour."

Izzy Myers laughed gratingly.

"Well, we've brought you the first load," he said. "We've got a couple of visitors for you here; and the Big Shot will be along in a little while with Ma Kane —and maybe Pa Kane, too, I dunno. I guess you'll have a houseful—but this pair ain't fussy about their accommodations. The Big Shot said to tie them up in the barn until he got here."

"Oh, so that's the lay, is it?" There seemed to be something eager and malicious injected into the voice from the doorway. "Sure! All right! We'll try to make 'em nice an' *comfortable!* I get you!"

"Then get a move on!" Izzy Myers jerked out. "Bring some rope and a lantern!"

"Sure!" said the man. "I won't be a minute!"

And then it seemed to Enid that for a little while she became curiously detached from her surroundings, as though she had become mentally weary to the point of exhaustion, and that her mind stumbled and refused to function save only in a strange, numbed, apathetic way. She was conscious that her hands were tied behind her back, and that she was being made to follow a light that danced ahead of her. She was conscious that a big door made a creaking,

grating noise as it was unbarred and opened, and conscious that she was being fastened to something so that, though she was still standing on her feet, she could not walk any more. But all this did not seem to convey any concrete meaning to her.

Then, suddenly, at the sound of Izzy Myers's voice almost in her ear, her mind snapped back to normal again.

"If it'll amuse you any while you're waiting," he chuckled evilly, "you can shout your heads off; but it won't otherwise do you any good, 'cause there's no one within miles of here. I'd advise you, though, to save your breath until the Big Shot and Ma Kane get here, as I've a hunch you'll have to use your lungs then some!"

She made no answer, nor did Phil. The lantern gave only a very feeble light, but out of the shadows she could see Phil now a few yards away. They were like tethered cattle—tethered to the uprights of adjoining stalls! There weren't any *other* cattle! The barn seemed to be empty of everything, the floor quite bare, as though—yes, her mind was functioning again, and perhaps only too clearly now for her own composure and her own good—as though the place had been cleared out and put in readiness for—what? What the trucks were bringing? Probably! Did it matter? The gangsters, Izzy Myers, and the man with the lantern were going away now.

The barn door closed. She heard it being barred

—and then the men's receding footsteps gradually died away.

"Enid, keep working at your wrists." Phil's voice came quietly, inspiritingly out of the darkness. "There's always the chance of getting them loose, you know."

"Yes," she said, and began to struggle with her bonds. But they were very tight—she could scarcely move her wrists at all.

"Just keep at it!" he said encouragingly. "We can talk at the same time. And there's something I want to say—something I want to ask you. Will you forgive me for what I thought and what I said to you in your room to-night? I——"

"Phil—don't!" Her voice broke a little in spite of herself. "You'll make me cry—and I don't want to cry. There is nothing to forgive. Nothing! Nothing! How could there be! How could you have thought anything other than you did? Oh, please don't ever speak of forgiveness again!"

"All right—I won't," he said. "But there's something else. Last night in the taxicab. You remember, Enid? I told you what you meant to me. I told you that I loved you. And you said there could never be anything between us. Do you remember?"

"Yes," she said faintly.

"Was it for *my* sake? Because you thought that man was your brother—because you thought your brother was a criminal?"

"Yes," she said again.

"Then you did care!" His voice was trembling, eager. "You care now—Enid, you care now!"

"You know I care," she whispered.

She heard him strain and wrench at his lashings.

"God keep you, Enid!" he said hoarsely.

There was silence for a moment; and then his voice, in quiet tones, reached her once more.

"There is so much I do not understand," he said. "That photograph! Did you know who the Big Shot was that night when I told you the story about him in the Gondola? Did you think he was your brother then?"

"No," she said; "but it was that night when—when it all began. After I left the Gondola Shive Frank followed me. He took out of his pocket a folded piece of wrapping paper with an elastic band around it. He said it was for you—and that I was to give it to you. He was very insolent and offensive. I knew from what you had said that it must be something connected with the Big Shot. I told him I did not want to have anything to do with it, and that he could give it to you himself. He said he had had a warning of some sort, and that he was getting out of town—and then he dropped the package, if you could call it a package, on the sidewalk at my feet, and went on down the street."

"And was shot at the corner," Phil supplied tersely. "Yes—go on!"

"Yes," she said. "I had to pick it up, of course. I put it in my bag. When I got home the elastic had come off the wrapper, and—and I saw what had been inside. It was a snapshot of what had presumably been a group, but both ends had been cut away, and only one face and figure remained. I—I think I nearly lost my reason then. I thought it was the picture of my brother—that my brother Roy was the Big Shot. You—you saw the real photograph of my brother; you know that if the Big Shot had been sitting in that chair in uniform you would have said it was his photograph."

"Yes, I understand all that," he said gently; "but how did you ever find and get into actual touch with the man himself?"

"I will try to explain everything in a few words," she said—and, speaking in low, hurried tones, she sketched for him the story of the days and nights that had gone. "And," she ended, "that brings us to—where we are now. He has brought us here to make you tell him where those papers of Shive Frank are. Is it all clear? Do you understand it all now? I—I wanted to save him from himself if—if I could. And you—oh, I was so afraid for you! Oh, do you understand it all? Why—why I have done these things?"

"I did not know there was such love as yours," he said in a choking voice.

She was twisting at her wrists. They were bleeding

now, she thought—and were as mercilessly and tightly bound as ever.

"Have—have you loosened your hands any?" she asked tremulously.

"No," he answered. "Have you?"

"No," she said; and then, suddenly, tensely: *"Phil!"*

"What is it?"

"Did you hear anything?"

"No."

It was more audible now.

"Listen!" she breathed. "Now do you hear it?"

"Yes," he said. "There's someone working at the bar that fastens the door—and doing it as if he didn't want to be heard. That's queer!"

Neither spoke now. A minute passed—another. Then the door creaked slightly, and Enid could see that it was being slowly opened—and the next instant the ray of a flash light picked out both Phil and herself.

"Keep yer maps closed while I cuts youse loose!" cautioned a voice in a hoarse whisper.

A man was standing beside her; a knife was sawing at the cords around her. What did it mean? It was incredible! It couldn't be true that they were to be set free!

"Who are you?" she breathed wildly. "Why are you doing this?"

"Didn't I tell youse to keep yer face shut?" he an-

swered brusquely. "If youse don't ask no questions youse won't be told no lies—an' wot youse don't know won't hurt youse. See? Youse're in luck dat youse picked out to-night to come here—dat's all!"

She was free! She could still scarcely realize it. It still seemed as though it could not be *true!* Her hand trembled as she passed it across her eyes. The man, she could see, had gone over to Phil now. She heard Phil involuntarily ask almost the same questions; and then she heard the man's answer:

"Youse got next to wot I told de girl, didn't youse? Well, den, forget it! An' come along now, de both of youse—an' watch yer step, an' don't make no noise! Get me?"

She felt Phil's arm go round her and hold her for a moment as though he would never let her go again —and then they were following the shadowy form of their guide out through the barn door into the night. She looked around her. There was a light in the house now—a single light shining out through a window beside the porch. The guide, still indistinct and shadowy, led them across the yard. There was no fence. They came to the road. The man halted, and pointed along it.

"Dat's de way youse goes," he said; "not de *other* way! Understand? The road'll get youse somewheres if youse stays wid it long enough. An' if youse've got any dove-cooin' to do, I'm tellin' youse now to save it up for a couple of miles, 'cause it'll

be a lot *safer!* See? I ain't kiddin'! Now beat it—an' beat it hard!"

He had disappeared in the shadows.

"Phil, what does it mean?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered.

They went on along the road—but it was not two miles, nor indeed more than a meagre fraction of one, before they halted. And the minutes sped. And then they went on again.

There was no sign of life. They saw no houses. The road itself was little more than a wagon track.

"Do you know where we are, Phil?" she asked.

"No; I don't," he answered. "But, as the chap said, we'll come out somewhere. There's nothing to do but keep on going."

"Yes," she said. "I——"

The words died on his lips. They had come to a sudden halt, and were staring through the darkness each into the other's face. From far behind came the muffled sound of an explosion—another—and still another. And then, more faintly, but still distinct and unmistakable on the night air, the sound of rapid firing.

"What is it? Oh, Phil, what is it?" she cried out sharply.

"Bombs! Machine guns!" His answer came through tight lips. "That's it—I see it now! Don't you remember that warning over the telephone that the Big Shot wouldn't listen to? It was 'inside stuff,' after all

—and evidently not merely a matter of the trucks, either! It looks like a clean-up! I fancy we know now why we were let out of that barn—we were obviously *not* friends of the Big Shot!"

"Twisty Morgan's gang!" There was a sudden horror in her voice. "What—what do you suppose has happened?"

There was another burst of firing.

"God knows," he said soberly. "But I'm afraid it's bad business. They were probably hidden all around the house and were waiting for the Big Shot and the trucks—that's how they knew about us. Perhaps they didn't wait for the trucks. Perhaps they only waited until the Big Shot got there. They must have heard what Izzy Myers said."

"You think"—her face was drawn and white—"you think that——" Her voice broke.

"I don't know!" He shook his head. "I only know that I must get you somewhere where you will be safe to-night. To-morrow we will know."

"Yes," she said numbly.

There was no more firing.

They went on along the road again, but Enid stumbled a little now.

It was evening in the Gondola Restaurant. Phil, who had joined Enid at her table but a moment before, was speaking.

"I've just made the rounds," he said. "There are

some in the hospitals who are not likely to pull through; but the dead so far have all been identified —the Big Shot, the Kanes, Izzy Myers, and a fellow known as Alias Joe." He pulled a paper from his pocket and laid it down on the table before her. "Here's the latest edition. Do you want to ready any more about it?"

Her eyes caught the headlines:

RIVAL GANG BOMBS
BOOTLEGGING CACHE IN
WESTCHESTER COUNTY

FOUR MEN KILLED
ONE WOMAN VICTIM
OTHERS SERIOUSLY WOUNDED

Eyes blurred, she shook her head as she pushed the paper away from her.

"Oh, Phil," she whispered, "it—it is awful enough to think that these murders mean safety for us; but it—it all seems to mean something so much more, to go so far beyond anything in a personal way. Don't you understand? It is the fact that such things as these can happen. It—it seems almost beyond belief! And even yet, and though I know it all to be so terribly true out of my own experience, I can hardly bring myself to realize that these conditions not only exist in all their murderous defiance of the law, but

are actually flourishing in the heart of a civilized community to-day!"

He reached his hand across the table and laid it over hers. He remembered the night when at this very table she had told him her reason for coming to New York; and now his smile was gently quizzical as he looked at her, and there was a strange mingling of tears and laughter in his voice as he spoke.

"Why don't you write a book about it?" he asked.

THE END